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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

A Man of Conscience
by SOMERSET MAUGHAM

The Red Fox of the Cumberlands
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

A Perfect Target
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

Death Stops at a Tourist Camp
by LESLIE FORD

Peaceful in the Country
by THOMAS WALSH

THE BODY IN THE ROCKPIT
A BRAND NEW STORY by RUFUS KING

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

ONCE UPON A TIME I can remember dreaming up a revoltingly cute little epigram to the effect that if there were a Royal Family of mystery writers, the prime contenders for the top spots would inevitably be Rufus King and Ellery Queen. After which, of course, years went by in which there was somehow never the moment in which this cracked pearl could be tossed with exactly the right languid spontaneity into the conversation, and I thought I was likely to be stuck with it forever, until this truly unforeseen miracle occurred which gave us a brand-new story by Mr. King himself, THE BODY IN THE ROCKPIT, to feature on the cover. Which among other things is why I am vacating that Royal Box myself for an unprecedented two months in a row. For Rufus King's appearances at less than full-length novel size are so rare that any of them is a literary event, and this is a great month which gives us the honor of first printing one of them. And this is a maestro's masterpiece all the way to the last socko line.

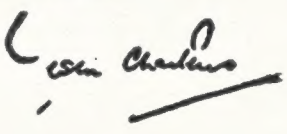
I think all our Japanese stories heretofore have been done by Walt Sheldon; so just to prove that we have not given him a monopoly on the country we take you to Nippon this time in A PERFECT TARGET by Lawrence G. Blochman, who also gets around.

Likewise I shall prove that I myself don't want an exclusive on making fun of policemen by letting Thomas Walsh do it this time, really delightfully, in PEACEFUL IN THE COUNTRY.

DEATH AT A TOURIST CAMP, by Leslie Ford, I hope will not discourage any of you from stopping at motels. I promise it's most unlikely to happen to *you*.

W. Somerset Maugham is not only one of this era's smoothest craftsmen, but he is also one of its most unorthodox philosophers. In A MAN OF CONSCIENCE you will find more shrewd observations on the psychology of murder than you would get from ten dozen lurid paperbacks—on top of a plot with a satirical jolt that nobody else would dare to attempt.

I too have done some studying up on murder in my time, and on sundry occasions (in other magazines) I have amused myself with retailing certain true anecdotes of mayhem which appealed to me, and which I have thought of collecting some day under the title of *Not So Saintly*. This month, as an experiment, I'm printing one of them here. THE RED FOX OF THE CUMBERLANDS is not fiction: no fiction writer would try to get away with such an incredible story. Let me know if you'd like some more of this kind occasionally, just for a change.



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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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Names to conjure with are scattered throughout all issues, for the stories are by the most famous writers of mystery, crime and detective fiction in the world—such greats as: Leslie Charteris, Ben Ames Williams, William Faulkner, Ben Hecht, Craig Rice, Philip Wylie, William Irish, H. G. Wells, Damon Runyon, Octavus Roy Cohen, Sax Rohmer, T. S. Stribling, Clarence Budington Kelland, Dorothy L. Sayers, Hugh Wiley, Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, Ray Bradbury, Graham Greene, Brett Halliday, P. G. Wodehouse, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Edgar Wallace, Mignon G. Eberhart, Hugh Walpole, Q. Patrick, Cornell Woolrich, G. K. Chesterton, Hugh Pentecost, Leslie Ford, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Walsh, MacKinlay Kantor, Rufus King, Peter Cheyney, George Fielding Eliot, Fredric Brown, and many, many others.

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the body in the rockpit

by . . . Rufus King

Murder with violence has a deadly way of gravitating toward beauty in distress. But Stella Huntering's trouble was of her own making.

SHE WORE shorts well, and the Florida sun had baked her skin to a proper gold. Around her neck, in spite of the informal shorts, she wore a strand of black opals.

The bartender asked what her pleasure was. He had dark eyes, appraising eyes that could appraise anything whatever, and almost always it turned out that he was right. He figured the opals were genuine.

"Do you have allasch?" she asked.

"No, but we've kummel. It's about the same thing."

"I know, but allasch is richer. More loose. All right, some kummel, please."

They were alone in the small, shadowy bar and the traffic of trucks and cars smashed past along Route 7 on its way to Miami, or from Miami to the north. It was around three in the afternoon, the Sargasso Sea time for the tavern, before the regulars would get through work and drop in. Her age, the bartender decided, could be almost anything

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Rufus King is one of a small group of mystery story writers—all deservedly famous—who have won recognition as serious novelists by the sheer brilliance of their characterization, and their judicious use of mystery to illuminate the startlingly contradictory elements in human nature. Most of the experts agree that his widely popular novel of suspense, DEATH IN MIAMI, *set a new high water mark in its darkly brooding intensity. And here, in briefer compass but in a similar Florida setting, is a brand new Rufus King crime-entertainment.*

---

and it wouldn't matter, but the one thing you could be certain of was that she was loaded, both physically and in the bank.

She dug out a lipstick and went to unnecessary work with it, while the upper fringe of an eye slipped past a compact's mirror and took in the young cast of his features and his strong, well-formed hands. Then down to his hips. Dancing hips. Either that, or a boxer's.

"Are you Spanish?" she asked.

"No, not Spanish," he said. "Just mixed."

"Me, too. I'm Irish, mostly. Black Irish. Have one with me, won't you?"

"Thank you," he said. "Are you visiting?"

"Well, no. Not unless you could call it visiting to stay in a house when the owners are gone from it."

A glance brushed the fingers of her left hand. No rings. No band of white around the suntan where a ring would have been removed. Not married. Good.

"This house," he said, "it belongs to some friends?"

"Yes. Dick and Effie Carrington. They go back north for the summer. Michigan. What's your name?"

"Phil."

"Honestly? You'd expect something more like Carlos or Arturo. That's olive you've got under your skin, not just suntan on top of it. Mine's Stella. Stella Huntering." She waited to see whether the name registered, meant anything to him but it didn't, and she said: "I write."

"Yes?" Phil was being nicely polite about it. "Books? What's the name of some of them?"

"Well, *Love's Harbinger* was the latest. Your wife may have read it when it ran in *Ladies' Home.* Crockman published it this spring."

"My wife didn't read it," Phil explained carefully, "because I am not married. I get it now, though. A friend of mine had a copy of it on the table. You're pretty famous, Miss Huntering."

"Well—yes. Call me Stella."

"All right, Stella. My friend said the book was pretty deep. Are you working on anything now?"

"Yes. It's why I'm down here during the off season. I wanted to get away from the usual pack of free-loaders that hang around. This house of my friends, it's on the beach. North of Baker's Haulover. They call it 'The Rockpit.'"

"It's nice there."

"Very nice."

"Nice people."

"No people. Not now. Just the blue Atlantic Ocean, my frog fins, and me."

"Frog fins—you go in for skin-diving?"

"I love it."

"I do a little, too. One of the men who drop in here is a professional diver. He got me interested in it. He set me straight on a few things."

"What things?"

"About the sharks, mostly, and barracudas. And blood. I wanted no part of them. He says there are two kinds of sharks that will attack a man who isn't bleeding from a wound. They're the tiger and the hammerhead. Of course all sharks will attack anything that loses blood under water, whether it's man or fish. A barracuda, he says, will do the same and will also attack a man at night even without any loss of blood. Barracudas feed at night. One funny thing he said about the blood."

"What?"

"He said a shark can instantly sense it. It can sense the smallest amount and will attack at once, even if it's from such a minor wound as a shaving cut. That's hard to believe, isn't it?"

"Yes, but it's interesting." She seemed to be lapsing into a world of private thought.

"Isn't this bar pretty much out of your territory?" Phil said.

"I like to drive around. I think best when I'm driving around, and I like to drop in on new places. Like here. Let's repeat, shall we?"

Phil poured repeats, saying: "You'll get me tight. Do you come south often?"

"No. I don't know much about Florida. It's been Jamaica, mostly, or Capri. I'd like to know more about it around here, though."

"I should think," Phil said, "that would be easy."

"No, it isn't. I feel foolish going around alone to clubs and places at night. It's the first time I've holed in, really."

"Gets lonesome, doesn't it?" He went on, professionally formal: "Or does your work occupy your time?"

She put a twenty on the bar. Phil made change. She left a fifty cent tip. She said: "Sure I get lonesome."

"We shut down at two in the morning," Phil said . . .

Was it love? Phil tried very honestly to figure it out. She had knocked him cold, with her Madonna face that could melt lava, while her fingers were cool and strongly soft as ice cream. Either you played the field or you stopped playing the field, and when you did stop it was like this and who wanted it. He did.

He'd done it for a week now, taking her everyplace, and it looped him silly to realize that he loved her more than any girl he had ever loved in his life, which were plenty. She was, in his very rosy regard, a star with a halo on it, a statue in rare marble from his family's homeland. Because you could trust her.

She asked nothing of you, and she said yes to even the slightest thing. Another drink? Yes. Some skin-diving? Yes. Home? Yes. She said it honestly, too.

With every beautiful, honest gesture that she made his admiration and wonder grew. Passion was there as well. Oh, yes, otherwise he would never have bothered with her in the first place, and have gotten himself into this emotional stew that cooked up to how nuts he truly was about her.

Several afternoons later when the doldrums as usual were blanketing the tavern Phil, again, was alone with the exception of one stranger. Phil's thoughts were warmly boxed around Stella. She wasn't going to show up because she'd flown to Nassau to join the Carringtons for a few days. They were the birds who had lent her The Rockpit near Haulover, and were taking a Carribbean cruise on their yacht. Stella's absence was killing him.

Indifferently he sized the stranger up, indifferently because his thoughts were locked so fast around Stella. The guy would be around his own age, about his size, but heavier built. Good looking in an open way, with that curly hair that the broads most certainly would fall for and probably had in shoals.

Phil went automatically into his line.

"Are you just down here for a while?"

"For a while. Fix one for yourself while you're at it."

"Thank you."

One of the regulars came in, a very lovely, fulsome redhead with eyes like great big emeralds. She sat down at that end of the bar which the regulars called the family end, and said: "Hello, Phil."

"Hello, Dora."

He opened a Schlitz for her without asking, and finished pouring a B & B for himself. "Boy, do I need this."

"Don't tell me it's already *phffft.*"

"No, but she flew over to Nassau this morning."

"Coming back?" asked Dora.

"Hell, yes, it's only for a couple of days." Phil moved along the bar to the stranger, using the usual gambit to boost the dead afternoon sales. "What's your name? I'd like you to meet Miss Bernhold."

"Wiggen. Jerry Wiggen."

"Mine's Phil." They shook hands. The guy's hand was cold in spite of the mercury outside hitting ninety. "Come on down to this end and join us."

"Glad to."

"Dora, meet Jerry. Jerry, this is Dora."

The three of them settled down to a spot of midafternoon drinking. They each bought a couple of rounds, and after a

couple of hot contests for drinks on the pinball machine Jerry had stopped being a tourist and began to be one of the family.

"Are you staying near here?" Dora asked him.

"No, I'm over at the beach. Near Baker's Haulover."

Phil's hands stopped still in the mixing of another round while the coincidence struck him, because it had to be just plain coincidence, and Dora was saying: "How come you landed out here in the sticks?"

"I—" Jerry emptied his glass before going on. "I've heard about it. From a friend. Told me it made a pleasant stopover for a quiet quarter of an hour. I wanted to check."

Phil had finished mixing the new round. He had changed his own drink from B. & B. and had almost filled a glass with slugs of straight brandy.

"Watch it, stinkpot," Dora said to him, eyeing the brandy. Then she said to Jerry: "Phil can't take it without seeing Stella every minute of the day and, I might add, the night. She's had him hopped to the ears for the past week and this Hamlet act is because she's ditched him for a couple of days in Nassau."

"Shut up," said Phil.

"Stella?" said Jerry.

"Yes," Dora said. "The notable Miss Stella Huntering. No bargain basement stuff for our Phil boy, nothing but the stars. Maybe you've heard of her? She writes."

"Ah, yes—*Love's Harbinger.*"

It was almost a sigh of satisfaction, the way the stranger said it, because he was a stranger again, withdrawn from the circle of the family.

Wiggen walked out through the shady quiet and into the smash of sun and traffic sound. He got into a convertible and joined the Miami-bound traffic, driving with the precision of a clever automaton.

He couldn't kill her in the house.

That much Jerry knew. He had a curiously devious mind which lay stashed behind the open candor of his face. It was a mind well stocked with knowledgable brilliance all set for whenever he cared to use it.

It was the same way with his sensitivities. They, too, were battened down because even though he could be hard and sort of elliptically tough any shadow, even one so unimportantly frail that another man would never notice it, that touched his integrity, his judgment, or his deeply imbedded idealism could hurt him down there inside his 182 pound body very much.

This Phil situation and Stella.

It was so disgustingly careless. It had the slob touch. The open jar of brushless cream and the razor, still uncleaned, on the

basin shelf of the bathroom connected with Stella's bedroom. The soiled sport shirt, Size Large —definitely not Carrington's, who was a shrimp—crumpled on the bedroom cupboard floor. Naturally the maid who came in daily had been aware of such things.

His unheralded arrival towards eight in the morning had caught her off balance. She was a cheerful, completely amoral woman with a blasé understanding of humanity warm in her chocolate eyes. Her name, she had told him, was Edith, and Miss Stella would be mighty unhappy she hadn't known he was coming, and waited home to greet him.

It had been a simple matter to extract from Edith the superficial aspects of the past week, even to the name of the tavern where Mister Phillip worked, and it sure was mighty clever and patient of Miss Stella to get material about bartenders at first hand like that for her new book. For a painful moment Jerry had felt that Edith had all been at the point of a giggle.

The ease and fluidity of this gossip made Jerry appreciate not only the awarenesses of the servant grapevine but what its threat could build up to during a police investigation.

Stella continued unique in his mind. He felt nothing, zero nothing, about Phil one way or the other. If there had been room for any emotion other than Stella Jerry conceivably would have liked Phil and have pitied him. Because of the rotten littleness of her tricks. As an example, her trick of removing her wedding ring while she was suntanning, so that no telltale band of white would show on her finger. That sort of shoddy trick.

Then the whole mental picture of her cheap interlude with a pickup after he, Jerry, had been square with her from the date of their marriage pulled a thick, dark curtain around every thought whatever. Not a curtain, exactly. A shroud.

The ocean, he finally figured, would be best. Right smack in their private little Atlantic Ocean which it amused the Carringtons and her to call their rockpit. And keep the story simple. She had a cramp. And though he dove and dove and dove he could not find her . . .

Phil arranged with the night bartender to take over early, and managed to catch a Pan. Am. flight out of Miami that landed him at Nassau that evening. After checking the Carrington yacht and several leading spots, he located Stella on the terrace of the Caribbean Club. She was seated with the Carringtons, and the three of them, Phil thought, looked cool and expensive and

smooth, with Carrington resembling a small dressed up sea horse, while his wife looked like a land version in mares. Only Stella had the glow of a beautiful idol, with candles of faith soft around her.

She seemed neither startled, glad, nor sorry when he joined them, and her face was as impersonal as her voice as she said: "Effie, this is Phil Barricini. Dick and Effie Carrington, Phil."

Carrington stood up and shook hands. He asked Phil to join them, while Effie Carrington took in Phil's physique and underlined the suggestion. Stella said nothing at all.

"Thank you, no," Phil said. "I've got to catch the next flight back to be on the job in the morning."

"Mr. Barricini," Stella said, "is a bartender in a tavern called The Friendly Rest."

"Darling," Effie said to Stella, "I adore you." While Carrington, thrown for a momentary loss at chit-chat, said: "Well, well."

"Stella," Phil said, "I've something to tell you. Take a walk with me, will you?"

Stella smiled at Effie and stood up. She moved with Phil across the terrace and onto a pathway that wound in privacy through tropical gardens.

Phil said without preliminaries: "It's about your husband. I made sure it was your husband, because I telephoned the house and Edith said he was."

"Yes?"

"Yes. He'd located the tavern through Edith. She remembered mentioning it to him, but when he dropped in, so far as I knew, he was just another stranger. Well, Dora dropped in, too. You know her big mouth, and anyhow she spilled the works about last week."

"Was there anything to spill?"

Phil said patiently: "Look, Stella—it's your husband I'm talking about. He's down here right now."

"I know he is. He telephoned me around dinner time. He said he had met you."

"You mean—just like that?"

"Just like that."

"Did he mention last week?"

"Casually. We were more interested in discussing our immediate plans."

"You've got no immediate plans but these, Stella."

He wrapped her close and gave her the sort of kiss labeled fathoms-down which never had failed to floor her, shooting his love, his passion for her into the job to their fullest extent. She waited in his arms, docile, until the performance was over and then disengaged herself, saying: "I'd wipe that clown makeup off your lips if I were you."

She repaired her own lips,

standing cold and composed under the moonlight and a sort of darkness rushed in on Phil and it was like black flame, searching, and licking him all over.

"What are you doing to me, Stella? What are you trying to say?"

"Trying?"

"Whatever it is don't act like this to me, Stella."

"Oh, for God's sake, cut out the string section, Phil. You yourself said one night that the limit would be about a week."

"And you said on the way home it was me. Nobody in the universe—universe, you said, Stella—but me." He reached out tentatively as a child would reach after an escaping, irridescent bubble. "And you meant it, Stella."

"Possibly. Then. But you've intelligence enough to see that the picture has changed? Jerry and I are shoving off for the coast. He's my agent as well as my husband. He's just landed *Harbinger* with M.G.M. It's why he came down."

"Stella, you must give me time, give us both time to talk this thing through. Tomorrow, whenever you get back from here—"

"I shall be back tomorrow but I shan't see you. We're leaving the day after and I'll be constantly tied up with Jerry."

The thought came to Phil as a sort of impossible revelation, and he said: "You love that jerk."

"I love that jerk. He's mine."

He soaked it up for a moment, the way a mop soaks up some noxious slop that's been spilled. He said: "I just passed by?"

Stella said, before she turned and left him: "What else?"

On the flight back, in the dim blue of the cabin, in his terrible aloneness and with the ugly mess of hate that made up his shredded stomach and soul and brains, Phil thought: *I am going to kill her. She will never go . . .*

So there were two lines converging towards a common point, the point being Stella or, more accurately, Stella's death.

The line representing Jerry held no hurdles of preparation. Simplicity was, and remained, its keynote.

Jerry went deadpan through the gesture of meeting Stella's flight from Nassau and you could wrap it up in a word, the balance of the day, for all the emotional fireworks that showed. Only once did they touch the surface. That was the moment when he picked up their flight reservations for the following afternoon. The clerk got a shock, then, at the look in Jerry's eyes when the thought struck Jerry that the ticket for Stella amounted to one for a woman who was slated, unprettily, to become a floater after the gasses formed.

The second converging line, held to by Phil, had its complications. This was in keeping not only with Phil's Latin blood and temperament, but with the fact that his daily life was spent in "figuring the angles."

He ruled out, as Jerry had ruled it out, the Carrington house. He came to the conclusion that accidental drowning was best, but there any similarity with Jerry's line ceased. There was no simplicity about Phil's evolving scheme. Bit by bit its pieces fell into shape as he went about the business of serving drinks, chatting, listening, smiling, looking sympathetically grave, whatever the mood of the customer of the moment demanded.

Stella had said: *Look, Phil, Jerry is as much of an enthusiast about skin-diving as I am. He'll undoubtedly insist on our doing it almost up to the last minute. And by us I mean himself and me.*

The remark became the focal point around which Phil's mind worked. It placed Stella in the ocean. It accoutered her in the equipment for skin-diving.

The professional diver who had briefed Phil on the danger of swift death from the sharks and barracudas had also warned him of the possibility of its happening accidentally. He summarized a mental digest of what the diver had told him: the regulator case which holds the main diaphragm of the breathing device is not keyed to the base casting. It depends on tightening a threaded ring to hold it in the correct position. If this ring were to become loose, and then if the outer case were to be turned slightly, the diaphragm would move out of the correct position and shut off the air.

Well, the threaded ring *would* become loose.

And it would be his hand (swimming up behind her in his own underwater equipment) that would turn the outer case.

The verdict, based on an official investigation: accidental asphyxia, due to an obvious malfunction of the regulator.

So the results from an official investigation did not bother Phil in the slightest. What did bother him was that one day during the past week when they had been skin-diving he had mentioned this very thing to Stella. In fact, it had interested her sufficiently so that she had jotted down detailed notes about it and put them in her file labeled Ideas. This was a file which she kept for possible future use in her writings.

Those notes would have to be removed from the file. Otherwise when Jerry went through her papers after her death he would come across them, and the method, even if not the proof, of her murder would be plain.

The obtaining of these notes, Phil decided, was a must.

With the coming of nightfall he drove over to the beach road and headed south towards Silver Shores, the incorporated community north of Baker's Haulover where the Carringtons had built The Rockpit. He waited patiently until he saw Stella and her husband drive off. Shortly afterward Edith, the maid, followed in her coupe, going home for the night.

Phil drove into the grounds, which were heavily landscaped with tropical shrubbery and palm trees, and parked by the garage. Using a key which Stella had given him, he went into the house and into the Florida room where, with its wide jalousies facing the ocean, Stella worked. Her packing for tomorrow's departure was still incomplete. He easily located the proper file and removed the notes on tampering with the breathing device. They were on a single sheet of paper which he folded and shoved into a pocket of his slacks. He left the house.

A pathway skirting the garage led him to the beach and to a cabana where the Carringtons and their guests dressed for swimming. It contained separate dressing rooms for the men and women. From a cupboard in the women's room he removed Stella's skin-diving gear. A brief smile touched his lips as he regarded the flippers that Stella used. They had been put on the market recently, evidently with a sales-appeal eye towards the number of women who were taking up the sport.

Before going to work on the breathing device, Phil drew on a pair of cotton gloves.

IT WAS at Stella's suggestion that she and Jerry ended the night's tour at Wolfie's, a popular eaterie with the late-hour gentry.

Apart from its acknowledged creative ability, Stella's mind was the supple one of the nymphomaniac, somewhat like a pale gray slate on which each experience of passion was marked in scarlet chalk and then as easily erased. As the episode of Phil was now erased. A forgotten number in a continuing list.

Being non-existent in her thoughts it never occurred to Stella to look around and see whether or not Phil might be there. He was, but even had she looked she would have failed to see him. He had picked up their trail at the Fontainbleu and had followed them down. He was sitting at a table in the far corner with his face concealed behind a dawn edition of the *Miami Press* and his eyes, like bullets, were straight against the print.

When they left, Phil left too,

and the converging lines moved more swiftly towards their focal point in what boded to be a dead heat.

The drive home was mostly in silence, with Stella still driving, and with both herself and Jerry well awash from the multiple drinks they had put to rest during their crawl of the night spots.

Dawn was coloring the eastern sky as they reached the house, and Stella was heading directly for bed when Jerry stopped her.

"Let's go in for a while before we turn in," he said. "I've never been under in the dawn like this. It will be wonderful."

"Darling, you're loaded."

"Maybe. So are you. What do you say, Stella? There's nothing like it to prevent a hangover."

He was ready by the time she reached the cabana, standing in the doorway, weaving a little, and with a loose grin on his face. Stella took a look at him and cut short a laugh.

"Jerry, you drunken idiot!"

"I am not drunk. I am not an idiot. And snap into it, will you, Stella? This wind is cold."

He left her abruptly. She hurried, but he was already in when she reached tide's edge. The sea was perfect, gentle, and the paint of dawn swept roses over the lightening sky, while the waters would be opalescent with strange shades . . .

In an unearthly suspension, Stella idly studied the ocean floor through an opaline semi-transparency of the dawn light filtering down. She knew that Jerry was around, somewhere near. It was like this always whenever she went below: a physical and mental calmness that approached Nirvana. She was really pretty drunk.

And like a dream was the sudden vision of Jerry—of two Jerrys—no—yes—one of them was holding the other down by his flippered feet—impossible—impossibly absorbing—the upper one was struggling, thrashing, then becoming abruptly limp and drifting with a current, moving in slow swirls away.

It was no dream. Under the stark realization of what she had just witnessed, Stella's alcoholic befuddlement left her. The figure that had been holding the other figure down shot surfaceward, and Stella surfaced right alongside. She tore off her mask.

Phil tore his mask off, too.

For a timeless moment each looked at the other. At first in mutual disbelief.

"Why was Jerry wearing those painted flippers of yours?" Phil said.

Stella's first impulse was to dive below and find Jerry, to do what she could, but the impulse was swept away—as the floor currents would then be sweeping Jerry's body away—by the implications in Phil's question.

She said: "You thought he was I."

It showed a definite light on Phil's character that even under what must have been extreme emotional stress of having just committed murder he immediately jumped into figuring the angles.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Stella."

She got it at once, of course. Even if she hadn't been agile at plotting, the basic gambit Phil had just tossed her was perfectly plain: his-word-against-hers stuff, and old as the hills.

With acid clarity Stella tied the scenario in a sentence: a man and his wife and her lover went swimming and the wife and her lover came back.

Stella clearly, dispassionately saw that with the triangle situation blazed in every tabloid in the country her future market as a paragon, as a nice, virtuous author for the family-reader would be as dead as Jerry was dead. Her career as a writer would be finished.

"We must talk this over. Carefully, Phil," she said. "I am beginning to believe it was an accident."

"I figured you would come around to that," Phil said.

They swam, with their separate calculations, towards the shore . . .

It was past noon before Chief Odin of the Silver Shores police department intruded upon the widow's grief. There was no longer any question as to Stella's state of widowhood. The body had been found by a surf fisherman at around seven, washed in by the rising tide. At that moment Stella had been, avowedly, in a nervous, grief-stricken collapse so the identification had been made by Phil—listed in the first press releases as Mr. Phillip Barricini, a close family friend. It was also Phil who originally had spread the alarm and had issued a statement covering a general account of the accident.

Odin was a frankly puzzled man. Also, he felt, a helpless one. He admitted as much to himself. His intensive and swift examination of such background material as he and his men had been able to unearth during the past several hours apparently left him with his official hands tied.

Odin listened with an air of sympathetic attention as Stella calmly, unhesitantly gave him an admirable thumbnail sketch. It had been arranged last night, when they had run into one another, that Mr. Barricini return with her husband and herself for the balance of the night—the hour then being practically dawn. The suggestion was the result of a kind offer on Mr. Barricini's part to drive them to the airport later in the day, when she and Jerry were leaving for New York on their first leg to

the coast. They had, the three of them, been rather high—Chief Odin would understand. Chief Odin did.

"Then I take it, Mrs. Wiggen, that this skin-diving decision was just one of those sudden impulses?"

"Yes," Stella said. "Jerry's idea was that a swim would prevent a possible hangover, especially in view of the coming flight."

"I see," Odin said. "Your friendship, yours and your husband's friendship with Mr. Barricini has been one of long standing, Mrs. Wiggen?"

"Isn't the time element in friendship purely relative, Chief Odin? Some people one seems immediately to have known forever, and with others years can pass without ever truly knowing them at all?"

"My psychology is somewhat rusty, Mrs. Wiggen, but I am sure that you are right. Now as for the tragedy itself, just what can you remember of it?"

"Little," Stella said, "and what little I do remember is completely confusing. The three of us were within sight of one another, and then Mr. Barricini and I surfaced. We—we waited quite a while for my husband to surface also. He didn't."

"I understand from Mr. Barricini that both of you looked?"

"Exhaustively — repeatedly! There are those bottom currents. Chief Odin, Mr. Barricini was explaining to me shortly before you came that your examination of my husband's breathing device showed a defect?"

"Not defect," Odin said. "Rather, a malfunction of the diaphragm control. The medical examiner is quite satisfied, Mrs. Wiggen, and has certified the case as an accidental death."

"Then there will be no inquest? You can understand how the publicity—"

"I do understand thoroughly, Mrs. Wiggen. I shan't be technical about this, but the alcoholic content of your husband's blood was such that any stoppage of air —such as the malfunctioning of the diaphragm of the breathing device—could well have resulted in almost instant asphyxia."

Odin stood up. In common sense there was nothing left him but to take his leave. Murder, he was satisfied, had been done and an indictment for murder, he was satisfied, could never be obtained in a hundred years. Not with a woman of this position and mentality, with sufficient money to command smart batteries of counsel. So he left.

After Odin had gone, Stella turned with the force of a deadly rage that had been building during the past hours. "Phil, you're covered. You're in the clear," she said. "Now get out."

Phil went to a cellarette and mixed himself a Scotch.

"We're both in the clear," he said. "So long as I keep it that way."

"You'd better explain that, Phil."

"Easy. Remember those notes you made? About the dope I gave you about the breathing device?"

"Certainly I do. They're in that file."

"They *were* in it, Stella."

She joined him at the cellarette. She mixed a stiffer Scotch than he had, and while she drank it the picture expanded in its dangerous detail. She had felt no particular revulsion of horror at what Phil had done, but rather an overwhelming rage that she should have been (as she was) dragged so inescapably into the setup with him. He had simply to produce those notes in her own handwriting on the perfect murder plot. They were a sword of Damocles to be held over her head for as long as she lived.

"How much?" she said. "I'll write you a check right now."

"Money? Don't be silly, Stella. You are going to be my wife."

Six months later they were married. Oddly, among the numerous messages of congratulation and felicitation, was one from Chief of Police Odin. In it he formally expressed the wish that they would receive all of the happiness which they deserved.

They established their legal residence in Florida, with Stella sinking the bulk of her fortune in Gold Coast real-estate. All of which under the law became communal property with her husband.

Stella's career as a writer moved at its regular pace successfully ahead. As for her personal life with Phil, the physical blaze helplessly would recur, but afterwards they would lie with the dawn's thin fog drifting in from the sea, with the flesh of their bodies, in reaction, distasteful to the touch.

And all through the patient procession of day after day their thoughts, like birds of ill-omen, revolved around the only problem left them in the world—how each could kill the other best.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT *will be*

LESLIE CHARTERIS, *with* "The Pluperfect Lady"
EDGAR WALLACE, *with* "The Treasure of Mr. Reeder"
CARTER DICKSON, *with* "A Case for Colonel March"
CORNELL WOOLRICH, *with* "The Death Stone"
GEORGE HARMON COXE, *with* "Alias the Killer"
HUGH WILEY, *with* "The Missing Diamond"

the red fox of the cumberlands

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Taylor's wickedness would have appalled a modern psychiatrist. How were the simple mountain folk to know he was a deadly killer?

ONE OF THE more beguiling attractions about writing a true crime story, to a congenital melodramatist like myself, is that you are absolved from the tedious obligations of being plausible and of avoiding hackneyed situations. No censorious editor, captious critic, or complaining reader is entitled to tell you "Oh, but that situation is just too incredible." Your answer is complete and conclusive: "I can't help it. It happened."

That is the only way I need to justify the unbelievable effrontery with which the Reverend Lemuel Taylor literally got away, at least for some time, with murder. And if anyone wants to object further that to have the villain masquerading as the most respected innocent in the cast is the most threadbare device in mystery writing, my answer is the same. This isn't my plot. This is only what happened.

When Mr. Taylor first made his appearance in the Cumberland Mountain country near the

Anthony Boucher, an uncommonly discerning mystery expert, has sagely pointed out that there is a dwindling distinction now between a good fact crime story and the best of detective fiction. As if to confirm this dictum to the hilt Leslie Charteris has surprised us in a most amazing fashion. And for this month he has hearkened to the Saint's plea for a brief, well-merited vacation and has come up with a brand new, true crime mystery of such brilliance and veracity we can easily picture Simon himself sitting up straight to acclaim it—in a halo-bright hammock somewhere between Bermuda and the Pleiades.

Kentucky-Virginia border in the spring of 1892, he mentioned his name and said he was forty years old. More than this concerning his background and genealogical antecedents, he never specifically divulged

But after it became clear that this indentification was all anyone expected him to reveal, his modest reluctance to talk about himself ended. He discoursed long and loudly on his achievements, professing to have been personally selected by God to carry on His work among mortals. He boasted of his jousts with Satan and the sinners he had rescued from Hell's fire, leading them out of eternal darkness into the glorious light of righteous living.

He did not say exactly where these conversions took place, but apparently no one asked him. Times being what they were in a ruthless pioneer land where a rich new coal field just had been opened, and the Reverend being armed with a commission as deputy United States marshal signed by President Grover Cleveland, as well as a working agreement with the Almighty, the good mountaineers and miners accepted him at face value, welcoming him to their sinful and pastorless fold which anyone could see was sorely in need of the talents he claimed to possess.

What the Reverend Taylor forgot to mention, however, was that he also was possessed of the devil.

Taylor was a huge man, six feet two inches tall, and brawny. His head was crowned with a shock of fiery red hair, the reflection of which some thought was a halo. Beneath beetling brows there were a pair of piercing eyes, mysterious black pools, soulless and bottomless as the coal pits themselves. This was a departure from nature's usual color scheme, an error no doubt made in a flurry of pre-natal haste that also cursed him with a split personality. Those same eyes could exclude saintly compassion and inspire trust, or blaze with evil and cruelty, as his changing moods dictated. He moved with the stealthy grace of a cat, and, except when preaching, spoke with a soft drawl that tagged him as having been reared among Southern folk of breeding and education.

But when he preached, he started with a throaty rumble like distant thunder across mountain peaks, which intensified in cadence and fury until he was roaring and bellowing like a bull against the dreadful consequences of sin. So convincing was he in depicting what happened to unrepentant backsliders that one could almost see the leaping flames of hell and smell the burning brimstone.

If anyone wondered why the Reverend Taylor had come to the

vicinity of Wise, Virginia, he did not leave it long in doubt. One of his first missions, even before establishing himself as an itinerant evangelist, was to pay a courtesy visit to Sheriff Webb Killen, of Wise County. Displaying his marshal's commission and silver star, he announced that he had come to help clean up sin and crime in the new coal fields as well as to renovate a lot of tarnished souls.

"I've heard," said he, "that ye've been troubled lately with murders and robberies along the border."

Killen's jovial smile changed swiftly to an expression of grave concern.

"That's right, marshal. There have been a dozen outrages during the past six months, all committed in the same way, most likely by the same mysterious bandit. He was seen but once, by a child found dying at the side of her dead mother who had been raped and shot."

As he spoke Sheriff Killen's eyes were fixed on the head of his visitor, who had casually removed his hat.

Taylor drawled: "Aye, they told me about it over in Kaintucky. The child described the monster as having red hair and a red beard."

The sheriff nodded.

"He's called the Red Fox of the Cumberlands hereabouts." His expression changed again to a broad grin as his eyes dropped to meet those of Taylor. "Quite a coincidence, I'd say. Doesn't it trouble you, marshal, to think of what might happen if someone got the idea that you . . ."

Taylor leaned back in his chair and chuckled.

"I've thought of it, but I'll take my chances. After all, redheaded men are not so uncommon that every one of them would be suspected of being your bandit for that reason alone."

Sheriff Killen observed the face, chin and neck of his visitor, deeply bronzed from years of exposure and seamed like the creases in an old boot.

"You don't look as though you'd shaved off a beard right recently," he remarked. "Seems like we can count you out as the Red Fox."

Taylor turned on a piously disarming smile. "Thanks, sheriff, for the compliment, and the confidence," he added. "Fact is, I'm more interested in destroyin' the devil and all his works than in harmin' a hair on the head of any of God's chillun."

In addition to his clerical talents, the Reverend Taylor was a man of many facets, kind, thoughtful and self-effacing one moment when it suited him; cruel, heartless and arrogant the next, yet always an enigma behind his disguise of godliness and a religious double-talk. If he ever was married he succeeded in

keeping it a well-guarded secret. The names and whereabouts of his family were never known. He was a jack of many trades, too, but liked best to be known as "Reverend." Where he acquired his theological knowledge and gift for extemporaneous preaching, at which he was a master, also is unknown.

He was an above average Bible student and quoted scripture endlessly. He also had a working knowledge of medicine and surgery and was a herb doctor who administered successfully to the sick, a midwife of no mean ability, a trapper and accomplished woodsman. By the time biographers got around to writing of his life, no State or Federal official would admit having recommended or appointed him to the post of deputy U. S. Marshal. Yet his commission was not a forgery. Efforts to trace his early life and activities through this commission failed, the records disclosing only a confusion of statements that proved to be false and worthless upon investigation.

By the time Taylor had been among the hill-billies and miners for a year, he was trusted and revered almost to the point of idolatry. Everyone for miles around knew and respected this saintly man who selflessly ministered to them in sickness, contributed generously with money to those in need, and preached the kind of religion which he told them would save their immortal souls from everlasting damnation if they walked steadfastly along the trail he blazed for them.

If he had occasional enemies, only he knew; and they somehow managed to disappear before word of it, or their suspicions of him, were noised around.

As the months passed, the Reverend Lemuel Taylor became a legend in the mountains and coal country. His friends and followers were legion. He was first at the bedside of the sick. He delivered and baptized the infants. He married the younger generation and preached the funeral orations at the burial of the oldsters. He labored ceaselessly to suppress crime and bring evil doers to justice. Invariably Taylor was in hot pursuit of highwaymen, thieves, and murderers, ahead of Sheriff Killen, especially when the Red Fox of the Cumberlands was suspected.

And the Red Fox? Well, he had become as much of a legend and symbol of evil as had the Reverend Taylor for good. While Taylor struggled to combat Satan, the Red Fox continued to be an unholy phantom, preying on rich and poor alike, striking at precisely the right moment when escape would be assured. And if, perchance, some unfortunate witness loused up the schedule by being in some place where no witness was supposed to be, he

paid for his intrusion with his life.

The Red Fox operated on the old pirates' maxim that dead men tell no tales. Except for the one time already recorded, no one ever saw him and lived to tell of it. Yet rarely was there a pay-day at the mines, or some trapper sold his catch of pelts, when the Red Fox failed to strike.

When this occurred, and the Reverend Taylor heard of it, he would cast off his clerical robes, and, swearing terrible earthly vengeance on the transgressor, take off into the wilderness on the trail. When this transition from the enforcement of God's law to that of man's took place, Marshal Taylor would appear in an appropriate get-up of buckskin britches and tunic, his silver badge of office pinned on his breast, bowie knife in his belt, and musket in hand.

Sometimes upon his return a week or more later, he would report to Sheriff Killen that he had caught up with the criminal, and waged a desperate hand-to-hand duel with him, finally wounding him mortally. The criminal then had confessed, he would relate, whereupon Taylor returned to his ecclesiastical role, prayed with the fellow for forgiveness, and when he died, buried him in the forest. Of course, it would not have been practical to bring the corpse back with him.

As evidence, Taylor would exhibit the scars of cuts on his hands and arms, and point to bloodstains and slashes on his clothing. On these occasions Taylor always displayed a lock of hair, rarely red, which he said he had cut from the head of his victim.

"Not the Red Fox," he would say, disappointment in his voice, as he held the gruesome relic out for examination. "Not yet, but some day, with the Lord's help, I'll get him."

Once he brought in red hair, coarse and wiry.

"From his beard," he explained. "We fought with knives. I wounded him. But as I prayed to the Almighty for deliverance of his soul from damnation, he made a break for the bush. I grabbed him by the beard, but he wrenched away and was gone. The hair remained in my hand."

At first the Reverend Taylor confined his religious harangues to condemning sin in general and detailing the certain penalty in store for the heretics who declined the particular brand of salvation which he prescribed. Being a free-lance preacher with no formal church connection, he rarely had an opportunity to sell his dogma in a consecrated edifice, but any fair-sized barn in which he could assemble a score or more sinners suited him just as well.

As time wore on he began to specialize in the subject of fornication. This, he said, was sure-fire

damnnation, except when indulged in on specific orders from the Almighty. He was subtle enough not to come right out and claim his spiritual commission from heaven included carte blanc in such matters, but he succeeded in leaving an impression to that effect.

His favorite biblical character was King David, whom he always built up as a wise and holy man, while admitting that he was a great adulterer, but saying that this sin was tolerated among the heavenly hosts because God, in His infinite wisdom, ordered it as a means to an end.

The end never was satisfactorily explained, but Taylor, being no dope, had learned early in his evangelical career that his dupes never questioned what was written in the scriptures, and actually got a more vicariously righteous bang out of this subject than they did from the less earthy doctrine of brotherly love *and* faith as a way to grace.

Eventually Reverend Taylor's shows were something to behold. After an hour or two of working his followers into a lather of religious frenzy, he would suddenly begin to tear off his clothing, at the same time exhorting the flock to do likewise. And when they had stripped themselves, he would join them on the floor, bawling: "Roll, ye sinners, roll, and cast off your iniquities into the dust!"

Believe it or not, they did, too.

Among Taylor's early converts was one Cal Fleming, a worthless youth, allergic to honest work, who had been involved in minor difficulties with the law since childhood. So it was a fine feather in the preacher's cap when he succeeded in reforming the fellow and persuading him to get a steady job. Fleming appeared to work hard for a time, saved his money, and prospered. He attended his benefactor's religious meetings, frequently being pointed to as the "horrible example" who had repented and been saved.

On more than one occasion when Taylor was on the trail of a criminal or preaching in some distant sector of the frontier, his protege accompanied him. There were those who wondered at Fleming's continued prosperity, especially when he had been spending most of his time with the preacher instead of working. When the thought was expressed too loudly in words and in public, Taylor always explained that he was preparing his apprentice for the ministry. This always silenced the skeptics, for no one was prepared to question Taylor's word or good intentions.

Actually, however, Fleming's reformation was brought about more by Taylor's knowledge of a serious crime the youth once had committed than by the gospel having penetrated to his aban-

doned soul. Taylor discovered that he could use Cal to advantage. So, with Fleming's freedom as the price, he bought what he thought was a complete loyalty and obedience.

One day in early August of 1893, Fleming was riding an overland trail from the East when he overhauled a lumbering covered wagon drawn by a team of horses. Two fine cows were tethered to the tailboard. A middle-aged man was driving, and in the vehicle the mother of the younger. Beside the rig a boy in his early teens walked barefoot.

Fleming asked the usual questions about their origin and destination, talked pleasantly with the man while the horses were being rested, then noticed the younger woman. Immediately his interest became one of glandular imagination rather than concern for the safety of the wayfarers.

The latter, however, was his cue to gain their confidence. He told them that the country was rough and wild, infested with footpads, particularly a bandit known as the Red Fox, and unsafe for a small party such as theirs. He offered to ride with them and guide them through Pound Gap, a dangerous and difficult pass across the mountain range into Kentucky.

Thankful for the advice, the man accepted Fleming's offer. He said he was Ira Mullins. He thereupon introduced his wife, Sarah, his daughter, Ruth, a pretty 22-year-old brunette, and his 14-year-old son, Tom.

For the remainder of the day Fleming rode with them, spinning tall tales of the coal country and of his own importance. He recited imaginary encounters with bandits, and related one thrilling experience when he had encountered the Red Fox and finally driven him off after a long-range rifle duel.

Mullins, in turn, warmed to his new-found friend, grateful for any kind of reinforcement during the passage through such a terrifying wilderness. He said that they were headed for the coal fields where they would make their home. The depression and money panic had stripped him of all but a small stake, he explained, which totaled a meager $500 in cash, together with his horses, cows, and some furniture.

That evening Fleming led them to a place where he said they could camp safely for the night. He explained that he must ride a few miles further to make a report to the sheriff that travelers were passing through, but that he would return before they were ready to resume their journey in the morning.

True to his word, Fleming was back at sun-up. The Mullinses said nothing had happened during the night, although Ira and the boy had stood watch by turns so they would not be surprised if

bandits should attack. The women prepared a meager breakfast which they shared with Fleming, and a litle later they were under way.

With every passing hour the going became more difficult. As they neared Pound Gap the trail narrowed and became rougher, and the grade grew steeper. Halts were called more frequently to rest the sweating horses. By mid-afternoon they were at the entrance to the pass.

On both sides of the trail the terrain sloped back and upward for a hundred feet, then rose in almost perpendicular rocky ledges dotted with huge boulders. It was a winding tortuous route, trying the endurance of men and animals, but it was the only way through Virginia to Kentucky and the promised land which the Mullins family sought.

At the end of an hour, Fleming suggested that they rest at a spot where the trail widened slightly and leveled off near a spring from which clear cool water bubbled. All around were rocky parapets. It was a perfect place for an ambush.

The women were helping Mullins to unhitch the horses so that they could drink at the spring, when a rifle cracked somewhere above and Ira Mullins pitched forward and lay still. He had been a sitting duck for a hidden marksman.

With the first shot the women screamed and stood frozen with fright. The boy dove under the wagon to temporary safety. Fleming, standing beside his mount, started towards the girl with a cry of warning. Then, as a second shot sounded and a slug whistled past his head, he too sought shelter in a clump of bushes.

Twice more the rifle barked before the women recovered sufficiently to realize their danger. Both dropped in their tracks with bullets through their hearts.

The attack was over as swiftly as it had commenced. The boy, Tom, had crawled from beneath the wagon and disappeared. The two horses, released from their traces before the first shot, and Fleming's mount, had galloped away in terror. The cows, still tethered to the rear of the wagon, were huddled together, lowing plaintively.

Fleming, from his place of safety in the bush, peered out at the carnage in disbelief. Only then did he realize how close he had come to lying dead in the trail with the others. The memory of that second slug whining so close to his head dispelled any thought he might have had of venturing into the open to see if any of the three victims might still be alive. Quickly and silently he crept into the woods, abandoning any idea of finding his horse, and started hiking towards Wise, which was about 15 miles distant.

He had gone only a short dis-

tance when he came upon Tom Mullins, petrified with fear and in tears. Consoling the boy as best he could, he explained what had happened and told him he must come along into the village where he would be taken care of.

"Did you see him?" Tom asked, his voice still trembling with remorse and terror.

Fleming shook his head.

"No, did you?"

"Yeah. I just saw his head and shoulders up behind a rock when he shot ma and sis. He had red hair and a red beard. I'd know him if I saw him again. I'm sure I would."

"The Red Fox," Fleming said almost in a whisper. "You be sure and tell the sheriff about it when we get to Wise."

With Fleming leading the way they moved rapidly through the forest, but it was dark by the time they walked into the office of Sheriff Killen and told their stories. A posse was rounded up and a deputy dispatched to inform Marshal Taylor of the crime.

Taylor was sleeping in his cabin when the courier arrived. Upon being told of the wanton massacre, he flew into a sanctimonious rage, calling on God to avenge this awful deed, and swearing that he, personally, would take the trail and stay on it until he had brought the murderer to justice. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," he quoted in pious indignation, adding: "But I'm going to handle this one myself."

By the time Taylor and the deputy reached Pound Gap, the posse was there and preparing to bury the three victims.

Not far away on the trail the three horses were found quietly grazing. The cows had been cut loose and disappeared. A little later, when no clues had been found other than evidence that the wagon had been ransacked in search of money and valuables, the men spread out in the mountains to take up the search for the killer.

Two days later all of them, including Marshal Taylor, returned empty-handed, reporting that they had found no trace of the bandit.

Meantime, young Tom Mullins had been taken into the sheriff's home until something could be done about him. He related the story of the massacre and the hours preceeding it when Fleming had been riding with them, and how Cal had found him wandering in the woods and brought him to Wise. Tom was emphatic in his statement that he had seen the head and shoulders of the bandit and that he had red hair and a red beard.

Fleming, also, not only volunteered his version of the crime but was questioned at length by Sheriff Killen, who wanted to know how it was he had been

riding with Mullins. Were they friends or acquaintances? Where had he met them and how? What did he know about them other than that they were on the way to the coal fields?

Fleming related the events of the 24 hours during which he had known the ill-fated family, frequently turning to Tom Mullins to ask if what he said wasn't true. In every case the boy nodded, confirming the story in its entirety. The only thing that puzzled the sheriff was why he had left the Mullins camp the night before the attack and where he had gone.

"Reverend Taylor was having a meeting that night and I had promised to attend," he said.

This was true, as Killen easily discovered. Moreover, the preacher confirmed the fact that his protégé had been with him.

A week passed. Hope for any immediate arrest of the Red Fox had been abandoned. But there was the problem of young Tom Mullins and what to do with him. Sheriff Killen, with whom the boy still was staying, was trying to help him. Both the Mullins horses had been found and sold, the money being turned over to the boy. But the two cows had not turned up. If they could be found there would be additional funds for Tom. So the sheriff, after obtaining descriptions of the animals from the boy, sent word around the country for farmers and settlers to be on the lookout for them.

Presently this bore fruit. A man living 20 miles from Wise came to Killen and told him he thought he had one of the cows.

"I bought it from Cal Fleming," he said.

Killen was surprised, but merely said that he and Tom would come out and look the animal over. If the boy could identify it then he would talk to Cal.

When Tom looked at the cow he nodded immediately.

"She was Paw's," he said, patting her affectionately on the neck. And the cow mooed in recognition and corroboration.

Later that day Fleming came to the sheriff's office in answer to his summons. Killen wasted no time getting to the point.

"Cal," he said brusquely, "where did you get the cow you sold to Jim Welden?"

Fleming flushed and hesitated.

"I found her on the trail," he replied.

"Didn't you know she was one of the two Mullins owned?"

This Fleming denied, but he couldn't explain why he had sold property that didn't belong to him, particularly a domestic animal that obviously had wandered away from someone's herd.

Completely suspicious now, Sheriff Killen lodged a charge of larceny against Fleming and

locked him up until he could investigate further.

The next day he visited Fleming in his cell.

"You know, Cal, I don't think you had anything to do with the Mullins murder. But a lot of people hereabouts do, and I've been hearin' talk they may try and string you up."

Fleming was panic-stricken.

"You wouldn't let them do that, would you, Webb?"

"Not if I can help it," Killen replied. "But you can help yourself more than I can by telling me everything you know about the affair. I've been thinkin' you know more than you've been sayin'."

Pale and shaking with fear, Fleming shouted: "Go get Lem Taylor. He can tell you what happened!"

Shocked at the implied accusation, Killen stared long and hard at Cal Fleming. Presently he demanded: "What do you mean by that?"

Fleming said: "Ask the preacher. He shot 'em!"

For the next hour Sheriff Killen listened to a sordid story that bubbled from the lips of the thoroughly terrified Fleming. As the plot unfolded, he didn't know whether to believe it or not. It seemed incredible, yet as the details were recited they somehow semed to fit into the strange jigsaw puzzle that had been the mystery of the Red Fox of the Cumberlands.

Fleming related that a year before, the Reverend Taylor had caught him in the act of robbing a mountain cabin. Warning him that he would be accused of, and probably hanged for, the crimes charged to the Red Fox, whether or not he had committed them, Taylor offered him liberty and sanctuary, promising not to reveal what he knew if Fleming would do his bidding.

Thereafter, Fleming said, he had acted as a spy for the preacher, tipping him off to likely-looking jobs and assisting him in others. He insisted he never had been involved in any murders until the Mullins wagon came along.

The evening after he met them on the trail and learned that they had money with them, he had informed Taylor while he was away from the camp. They had agreed that Fleming was to return to the intended victims, lead them to the place in Pound Gap where an ambush could be carried out successfully, pretend to aid them when the attack came, and make a hero of himself in the eyes of Ruth Mullins by his reckless courage and daring in facing the fire of the bandit. When the holdup was completed, he was to share half the loot with Taylor. Ruth was to be his, and Taylor had promised not to harm the girl.

The plot was carried out as

agreed until Fleming heard the leaden slug whine past his head. He then realized Taylor had decided to kill him along with the others. He was certain of it when he saw the girl fall under the gunfire.

Fleming said that a few days after the crime he went to Taylor and demanded his cut of the swag. Thereupon Taylor refused to pay off and threatened to kill him on sight the next time they met. Taylor also warned him that if he talked, he (Taylor) would accuse him of being the Red Fox. To emphasize the threat, Taylor produced a red wig and a false beard. He said he would plant them in Fleming's house in such a way that they would be found at the right time.

Half believing Fleming's story, but realizing that he was dealing with a very shifty character, the sheriff decided to approach the Reverend Taylor cautiously. Taking two deputies with him, they started for the preacher's cabin.

Taylor must have been warned in a vision that the jig was up, for when the officers arrived at his isolated place he was no longer there. A search of the shack revealed some loot, later identified as belonging to a man who had been robbed a year earlier. The lawmen also found a false red beard which Taylor had evidently forgotten in his haste to get away.

No longer was there any doubt in the mind of Sheriff Webb Killen that the mystery of the Red Fox at last had been solved.

The mills of the gods having started to grind, they really made fine grist of the evidence against the Reverend Lemuel Taylor. Among other things, a trapper, hearing of the charge against the preacher, came to Killen with a story of having helped him to escape.

Taylor, he said, had come to him with a tall tale and ten dollars, requesting him to pack him in a crate of raw skins which he was shipping to Cincinnati. The Reverend had supplied himself with some bread, a flask of water, and a hatchet with which to chop himself out when the time came.

The crate of pelts had been on its way for three days when Killen heard of it. It was possible the fugitive might have been able to extricate himself from his self-created coffin, but police in Bluefield, a junction point on the route to the Ohio city, were requested to search cars of local freight for the consignment of hides.

Presently they opened a car and heard a faint tapping within. And there was the case of pelts. As they watched for a moment the crate moved now and then, and from its stinking interior there emerged sounds of pounding.

When they opened it, they found the Reverend Taylor half

starved, cramped with rheumatism, and desperately sick. He made no effort to escape and agreed to go back to Wise County, Virginia, voluntarily. But he denied any connection with the Mullins crime.

The Wise County prosecutor nevertheless presented the case to a special grand jury, which promptly indicted Lemuel Taylor and Cal Fleming for first degree murder.

For a month the Reverend Taylor hovered between life and death. At last he recovered, and in November 1893 he was brought to trial in Circuit Court before Judge H. A. W. Skeen and a jury. With District Attorney W. G. Dotson prosecuting, the trial lasted five days, during which the little courtroom was packed with wide-eyed questioning and unbelieving mountain folk. In the end, the jury found Taylor guilty as charged. He was immediately sentenced by Judge Skeen to be hanged.

Because he had turned State's Evidence and helped to convict Taylor, Cal Fleming was permitted to plead to second degree murder, and was sentenced to 20 years to life in the State penitentiary. He served 18 years, then was freed in 1911 and went to Texas, where he was killed in a gun fight.

At the conclusion of the trial, when Judge Skeen asked Taylor if he had anything to say, the preacher launched into a tirade in which he declared that he was being framed and persecuted, likening himself to Jesus Christ, an illustrious predecessor.

"Even as heretics and unbelievers did to the Savior, you are going to crucify me for the sins of others," he bellowed in his best pulpit voice.

The date set for Taylors execution was early April 1894. Meantime, he continued to preach to crowds of faithful followers who gathered in the street in front of his jail cell. He continued to persist in denying that he was the Red Fox. Likewise, he continued to refuse to reveal anything about his true background and origin.

As the fatal day approached, he went a step further. One morning he announced to a public gathering that he was the Second Savior sent by God to save men from their sins, and that he would rise again from the dead to continue the work of the Lord among the faithful. That a large number of fuzzy-thinking fanatics actually believed him, was evidenced by later events.

On the day set for his hanging, he demanded to be clothed in a flowing white robe instead of the conventional black. He refused to have the usual hood placed over his head, and asked that the boots and socks be removed from his feet. These small favors were granted by the sheriff.

A great throng had assembled

since early morning in the jail yard and outside in the street to witness the exhibition which had more of the earmarks of a Roman holiday than a solemn legal execution. A special scaffold with thirteen steps had been built, and an extra strong robe, tested and stretched with a sandbag of the same weight as the condemned was provided. The county had even gone to the expense of painting the gibbet black and cleaning up the jail yard for the occasion.

As the hour approached the crowd was alternately quiet and mumbling. Little groups gathered, talked in whispers a moment about the ghastly prospect, and dispersed. Children whimpered and yowled to be held up higher so they could see the better. Fifty heavily armed deputies paced nervously among the witnesses, ready to thwart any last-minute attempt at a misguided deliverance.

When Taylor, at last appeared walking steadily between a pair of guards, and started to mount the scaffold, women shrieked and fainted; and strong men, unashamed, wiped tears from their eyes.

As the sheriff adjusted the noose, he asked in a loud strained voice that all could hear: "Lemuel Taylor, having been convicted by law and sentenced to be hanged until you are dead, have you anything to say before meeting your Maker?"

Everyone hung breathlessly on the anticipated reply. Quickly it came in the booming cadence so familiar to Lemuel Taylor's followers.

"Yes, I'm going to heaven to sit on the right hand of God. But in three days I will rise from the dead and be among you again."

From somewhere in the throng the voice of a heretic shouted: "You mean you're going to Hell!"

Whichever it was to be, the Reverend Marshal was on his way an instant later.

When they cut his body down, it was claimed by a hundred of the fanatical brethren. They took it to a barn where more than once he had preached his queer doctrines, and laid it out on a catafalque of rough boards softened with straw. There it remained for ten days; and when at the end of that time the promised resurrection failed to eventuate and it began to get a little high, the health authorities seized it and buried it in an unmarked grave in the wilderness.

Of course, The Saint himself, Simon Templar, the lovable rascal, will be back with us next month and in a long novelet, THE PLUPERFECT LADY.

a man with a conscience

by . . . Somerset Maugham

The penal settlements of French Guinea were rife with the blackest of crimes. But nothing could shake the will of Jean Charvin.

ST. LAURENT de Maroni is a pretty little place. It is neat and clean. It has an Hotel de Ville and a Palais de Justice of which many a town in France would be proud. The streets are wide, and the fine trees that border them give a grateful shade.

The houses look as though they had just had a coat of paint. Many of them nestle in little gardens, and in the gardens are palm trees and flame of the forest; cannas flaunt their bright colors and crotons their variety; the bougain-villaeas, purple or red, riot profusely, and the elegant hibiscus offers its gorgeous flowers with a negligence that seems almost affected.

St. Laurent de Maroni is the center of the French penal settlements of Guiana, and a hundred yards from the quay at which you land is the great gateway of the prison camp. These pretty little houses in their tropical gardens are the residences of the prison officials, and if the streets are neat and clean it is because there is no lack of convicts to keep them so.

"I have been accused," writes Somerset Maugham, "of making men out worse than they are. I do not think I have done this. All I have done is to bring into prominence certain traits that many writers shut their eyes to." Though the pen that wrote OF HUMAN BONDAGE *traces crime's darkest patterns here it has not failed to glorify the shining integrity of the human spirit in travail. A very great storyteller is Somerset Maugham, in near or far perspective.*

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One day, walking with a casual acquaintance, I came upon a young man, in the round straw hat and the pink-and-white stripes of the convict's uniform, who was standing by the roadside with a pick. He was doing nothing.

"Why are you idling?" my companion asked him.

The man gave his shoulders a scornful shrug.

"Look at the blade of grass there," he answered. "I've got twenty years to scratch it away."

St. Laurent de Maroni exists for the group of prison camps of which it is the center. Such trade as it has depends on them. Its shops, kept by Chinese, are there to satisfy the wants of the warders, the doctors and the numerous officials who are connected with the penal settlements. The streets are silent and deserted. You pass a convict with a dispatch case under his arm: he has some job in the administration. You pass another with a basket: he is a servant in somebody's house.

Sometimes you come upon a little group in charge of a warder; often you see them strolling to or from the prison unguarded. The prison gates are open all day long, and the prisoners freely saunter in and out. If you see a man not in the prison uniform, he is probably a freed man who is condemned to spend a number of years in the colony and who, unable to get work, and living on the edge of starvation, is drinking himself to death on the cheap strong rum which is called tafia.

There is a hotel at St. Laurent de Maroni, and here I had my meals. I soon got to know by sight the habitual frequenters. They came in and sat each at his little table, ate their meals in silence and went out again. The hotel was kept by a colored woman, and the man she lived with, an ex-convict, was the only waiter.

But the governor of the colony, who lives at Cayenne, had put at my disposal his own bungalow and it was there I slept. An old Arab looked after it; he was a devout Mohammedan, and at intervals during the day I heard him say his prayers. To make my bed, keep my rooms tidy and run errands for me, the commandant of the prison had assigned me another convict. Both were serving life sentences for murder; the commandant told me that I could place entire confidence in them. They were as honest as the day, and I could leave anything about without the slightest risk. But I will not conceal from the reader that when I went to bed at night I took the precaution to lock my door and to bolt my shutters. It was foolish, no doubt, but I slept more comfortably.

I had come with letters of

introduction and both the governor of the prison settlements and the commandant of the camp at St. Laurent did everything they could to make my visit agreeable and instructive. I will not here narrate all I heard and saw. I am not a reporter. It is not my business to attack or to defend the system which the French have thought fit to adopt in regard to their criminals.

Besides, the system is now condemned; prisoners will soon cease to be sent out to French Guiana, to suffer the illnesses incident to the climate and the work in malarial jungles to which so many are relegated, to endure nameless degradations, to lose hope, to rot, to die. I will only say that I saw no physical cruelty.

On the other hand I saw no attempt to make the criminal on the expiration of his sentence a useful citizen. I saw nothing done for his spiritual welfare. I heard nothing of classes that he could attend in order to improve his education, or organized games that might distract his mind. I saw no library where he could get books to read when his day's work was done. I saw a condition of affairs that only the strongest character could hope to surmount. I saw a brutishness that must reduce all but a very few to apathy and despair.

All this has nothing to do with me. It is vain to torment oneself over sufferings that one cannot alleviate. My object here is to tell a story. As I am well aware, one can never know everything there is to be known about human nature. One can be sure only of one thing, and that is that it will never cease to have a surprise in store for you. When I had got over the impression of bewilderment, surprise and horror to which my first visit to the prison camp gave rise, I bethought myself that there were certain matters that I was interested to inquire into.

I should inform the reader that three-quarters of the convicts at St. Laurent de Maroni are there for murder. This is not official information and it may be that I exaggerate; every prisoner has a little book in which are set down his crime, his sentence, his punishments, and whatever else the authorities think necessary to keep note of, and it was from an examination of a considerable number of these that I formed my estimate.

It gave me something of a shock to realize that in England far, far the greater number of these men whom I saw working in shops, lounging about the verandas of their dormitories or sauntering through the streets would have suffered capital punishment. I found them not at all disinclined to speak of the crime

for which they had been convicted, and in pursuance of my purpose I spent the better part of one day inquiring into crimes of passion. I wanted to know exactly what was the motive that had made a man kill his wife or his girl. I had a notion that jealousy and wounded honor might not perhaps tell the whole story.

I got some curious replies, and among them one that was not to my mind lacking in humor. This was from a man working in the carpenter's shop who had cut his wife's throat. When I asked him why he had done it, he answered with a shrug of the shoulders: "*Manque d'entente.*" His casual tone tone made the best translation of this: *We didn't get on very well.*

I could not help observing that if men in general looked upon this as an adequate reason for murdering their wives, the mortality in the female sex would be alarming. But after putting a good many questions to a good many men, I arrived at the conclusion that at the bottom of nearly all these crimes was an economic motive; they had killed their wives or mistresses not only from jealousy, because they were unfaithful to them, but also because somehow it affected their pockets.

A woman's infidelity was sometimes an occasion of financial loss, and it was this in the end that drove a man to his desperate act; or, himself in need of money to gratify other passions, he murdered because his victim was an obstacle to his exclusive possession of it. I do not conclude that a man never kills his woman because his love is spurned or his honor tarnished. I only offer my observation on these particular cases as a curious sidelight on human nature. I should not venture to deduce from it a general rule.

I spent another day inquiring into the matter of conscience. Moralists have sought to persuade us that it is one of the most powerful agents in human behavior. Now that reason and pity have agreed to regard hellfire as a hateful myth, many good men have seen in conscience the chief safeguard that shall induce the human race to walk in the way of righteousness. Shakespeare has told us that it makes cowards of us all. Novelists and playwrights have described for us the pangs that assail the wicked. They have vividly pictured the anguish of a stricken conscience and the sleepless nights it occasions; they have shown it poisoning every pleasure till life is so intolerable that discovery and punishment come as a welcome relief.

I had often wondered how much of all this was true. Moralists have an axe to grind; they must draw a moral. They think that if they say a thing often

enough people will believe it. They are apt to state that a thing is so when they consider it desirable that it should be. They tell us that the wages of sin is death; we know very well that it is not always.-And so far as the authors of fiction are concerned, the playwrights and the novelists, when they get hold of an effective theme they are disposed to make use of it without bothering very much whether it agrees with the facts of life.

Certain statements about human nature become, as it were, common property and so are accepted as self-evident. In the same way painters for ages painted shadows black, and it was not till the impressionists looked at them with unprejudiced eyes and painted what they saw that we discovered that shadows are colored. It had sometimes struck me that perhaps conscience was the expression of a high moral development, so that its influence was strong only in those whose virtue was so shining that they were unlikely to commit any action for which they could seriously reproach themselves.

It is generally accepted that murder is a shocking crime, and it is the murderer above all other criminals who is supposed to suffer remorse. His victim, we have been led to believe, haunts his dreams in horrifying nightmares, and the recollection of his dreadful deed tortures his waking hours. I could not miss the opportunity to inquire into the truth of this. I had no intention of insisting if I encountered reticence or distress, but I found in none of those with whom I talked any such thing.

Some said that in the same circumstances they would do as they had done before. Determinists without knowing it, they seemed to look upon their action as ordained by a fate over which they had no control. Some appeared to think that their crime was committed by someone with whom they had no connection.

"When one's young, one's foolish," they said, with a careless gesture or a deprecating smile.

Others told me that if they had known what the punishment was they would suffer, they would certainly have held their hands. I found in none any regret for the human being they had violently bereft of life. It seemed to me that they had no more feeling for the creature they had killed than if it had been a pig whose throat they had cut in the way of business. Far from feeling pity for their victim, they were more inclined to feel anger because he had been the occasion of their imprisonment in that distant land.

In only one man did I discern anything that might appropriately be called a conscience, and

his story was so remarkable that I think it well worth narrating. For in this case it was, so far as I can understand, remorse that was the motive of the crime. I noticed the man's number which was printed on the chest of the pink-and-white pajamas of his prison uniform, but I have forgotten it. Anyhow, it is of no consequence. I never knew his name. He did not offer to tell me, and I did not like to ask it. I will call him Jean Charvin.

I met him on my first visit to the camp with the commandant. We were walking through a courtyard round which were cells, not punishment cells, but individual cells which are given to well-behaved prisoners who ask for them. They are sought after by those to whom the promiscuity of the dormitories is odious. Most of them were empty, for their occupants were engaged in their various employments. Jean Charvin was at work in his cell, writing at a small table, and the door was open. The commandant called him, and he came out.

I looked into the cell. It contained a fixed hammock, with a dingy mosquito net; by the side of this was a small table on which were hit bits and pieces, a shaving mop and a razor, a hairbrush and two or three battered books. On the walls were photographs of persons of respectable appearance and illustrations from picture papers. He had been sitting on his bed to write, and the table on which he had been writing was covered with papers. They looked like accounts.

He was a handsome man, tall, erect and lean, with flashing dark eyes and clean-cut, strong features. The first things I noticed about him was that he had a fine head of long, naturally waving dark brown hair. This at once made him look different from the rest of the prisoners, whose hair is close-cropped but cropped so badly, in ridges, that it gives them a sinister look. The commandant spoke to him of some official business, and then as we were leaving added in a friendly way:

"I see your hair is growing well."

Jean Charvin reddened and smiled. His smile was boyish and engaging.

"It'll be some time yet before I get it right again."

The commandant dismissed him, and we went on.

"He's a very decent fellow," he said. "He's in the accountant's department, and he's had leave to let his hair grow. He's delighted."

"What is he here for?" I asked.

"He killed his wife. But he's only got six years. He's clever and a good worker. He'll do well. He comes from a very de-

cent family, and he's had an excellent education."

I thought no more of Jean Charvin, but by chance I met him next day on the road. He was coming towards me. He carried a black dispatch case under his arm, and except for the pink-and-white stripes of his uniform and the ugly round straw hat that concealed his handsome head of hair, you might have taken him for a young lawyer on his way to court. He walked, with a long, leisurely stride, and he had an easy, you might almost say a gallant, bearing. He recognized me, and taking off his hat bade me good morning.

I stopped, and for something to say asked him where he was going. He told me he was taking some papers from the governor's office to the bank. There was a pleasing frankness in his face, and his eyes, his really beautiful eyes, shone with good will. I supposed that the vigor of his youth was such that it made life, notwithstanding his position and his surroundings, more than tolerable, even pleasant. You would have said that here was a young man without a care in the world.

"I hear you're going to St. Jean tomorrow," he said.

"Yes. It appears I must start at dawn."

St. Jean is a camp seventeen kilometers from St. Laurent, and it is here that are interned the habitual criminals who have been sentenced to transportation after repeated terms of imprisonment. They are petty thieves, confidence men, forgers, tricksters and such like. The prisoners of St. Laurent, condemned for more serious offenses, look upon them with contempt.

"You should find it an interesting experience," Jean Charvin said, with his frank and engaging smile. "But keep your pocketbook buttoned up, they'd steal the shirt off your back if they had half a chance. They're a dirty lot of scoundrels!"

That afternoon, waiting till the heat of the day was less, I sat on the veranda outside my bedroom and read; I had drawn the jalousies, and it was tolerably cool. My old Arab came up the stairs on his bare feet, and in his halting French told me that there was a man from the commandant who wanted to see me.

"Send him up," I said.

In a moment the man came, and it was Jean Charvin. He told me that the commandant had sent him to give me a message about my excursion next day to St. Jean. When he had delivered it I asked him if he would not sit down and have a cigarette with me. He wore a cheap wrist watch, and he looked at it.

"I have a few minutes to spare. I should be glad to." He sat down and lit the cigarette I

offered him. He gave me a smiling look of his soft eyes. "Do you know, this is the first time I've ever been asked to sit down since I was sentenced." He inhaled a long whiff of his cigarette. "Egyptian. I haven't smoked an Egyptian cigarette for three years."

The convicts made their own cigarettes out of a coarse, strong tobacco that is sold in square blue packets. Since one is not allowed to pay them for the services they may render you, but may give them tobacco, I had brought a good many packets of this.

"How does it taste?"

"One gets accustomed to everything, and to tell you the truth, my palate is so vitiated, I prefer the stuff we get here."

"I'll give you a couple of packets."

I went into my room and fetched them. When I returned he was looking at some books that were lying on the table.

"Are you fond of reading?" I asked.

"Very. I think the want of books is what I most suffer from now. The few I can get hold of I'm forced to read over and over again."

To so great a reader as myself no deprivation seems more insupportable than the lack of books.

"I have several French ones in my bag. I'll look them over, and if you care to have them I'll give them to you if you can come along again."

My offer was due only in part to kindness; I wanted to have another chance of a talk with him.

"I should have to show them to the commandant. He would only let me keep them if there was no doubt they couldn't possibly corrupt my morals. But he's a good-natured man. I don't think he'll make any difficulties."

There was a hint of slyness in the smile with which he said this, and I suspected that he had taken the measure of the well-meaning, conscientious chief of the camp and knew pretty well how to get on the right side of him. It would have been unjust to blame him if he exercised tact, and even cunning, to render his lot as tolerable as might be.

"The commandant has a very good opinion of you."

"He's a fine man. I'm very grateful to him. He's done a great deal for me. I'm an accountant by profession and he's put me in the accountant's department. I love figures, it gives me an intense satisfaction to deal with them. They're living things to me, and now that I can handle them all day long I feel myself again."

"And are you glad to have a cell of your own?"

"It's made all the difference. To be herded with fifty men, the

scum of the earth, and never to be alone for a minute—it was awful. That was the worst of all. At home, at Le Havre—that is where I lived—I had an apartment, modest of course, but my own, and we had a maid who came in by the day. We lived decently. It made it ten times harder for me than for the rest, most of them, who have never known anything but squalor, filth and promiscuity."

I had asked him about the cell in the hope that I could get him to talk about the life that is led in those vast dormitories in which the men are locked from five in the evening till five next morning. During these twelve hours they are their own masters. A warder can enter, they told me, only at the risk of his life. They have no light after eight o'clock, but from sardine tins, a little oil, and a rag they make lamps by the light of which they can see enough to play cards.

They gamble furiously, not for love, but for the money they keep secreted on their bodies. They are unscrupulous, ruthless men, and naturally enough bitter quarrels often arise. They are settled with knives. Often in the morning, when the dormitory is opened, a man is found dead, but no threats, no promises, will induce anyone to betray the slayer. Other things Jean Charvin told me which I cannot narrate.

He told me of one young fellow who had come out from France on the same ship with himself and with whom he had made friends. He was a good-looking boy. One day he went to the commandant and asked him if he could have a cell to himself. The commandant asked him why he wanted one. He explained. The commandant looked through his list and told him that at the moment all were occupied, but that as soon as there was a vacancy he should have one. Next morning when the dormitory was opened, he was found dead on his hammock with his belly ripped open to the breastbone.

"They're savage brutes, and if one isn't a brute by the time one arrives only a miracle can save one from becoming as brutal as the rest."

Jean Charvin looked at his watch and got up. He walked away from me and then, with his charming smile, turned and faced me.

"I must go now. If the commandant gives me permission I will come and get the books you were kind enough to offer me."

In Guiana you do not shake hands with a convict, and a tactful man, taking leave of you, puts himself in such a position that there can be no question of your offering him your hand or of refusing his should he, forgetting for a moment, instinc-

tively tender it. Heaven knows, it would have meant nothing to me to shake hands with Jean Charvin; it gave me a pang to see the care he had taken to spare me embarrassment.

I saw him twice more during my stay at St. Laurent. He told me his story, but I will tell it now in my words rather than in his, for I had to piece it together from what he said at one time and another, and what he left out I have had to supply out of my own imagination. I do not believe it has led me astray. It was as though he had given me three letters out of a number of five-letter words; the chances are that I have guessed most of the words correctly.

Jean Charvin was born and bred in the great seaport of Le Havre. His father had a good post in the customs. Having finished his education, he did his military service and then looked about for a job. Like a great many other young Frenchmen he was prepared to sacrifice the hazardous chance of wealth for a respectable security. His natural gift for figures made it easy for him to get a place in the accountant's department of a large exporting house.

His future was assured. He could look forward to earning a sufficient income to live in the modest comfort of the class to which he belonged. He was industrious and well-behaved. Like most young Frenchmen of his generation he was athletic. He swam and played tennis in summer, and in winter he bicycled. On two evenings a week to keep himself fit he spent a couple of hours in a gymnasium. Through his childhood, his adolescence and his young manhood, he lived in the constant companionship of a boy called, shall we say for the purposes of this narrative, Henri Renard, whose father was also an official in the customs.

Jean and Riri went to school together, played together, worked for their examinations together, spent their holidays together, for the two families were intimate, had their first affairs with girls together, partnered one another in the local tennis tournaments, and did their military service together.

They never quarreled. They were never so happy as in one another's society. They were inseparable. When the time came for them to start working, they decided that they would go into the same firm; but that was not so easy. Jean tried to get Riri a job in the exporting house that had engaged him, but could not manage it, and it was not till a year later that Riri got something to do. But then trade was as bad at Le Havre as everywhere else, and in a few months he found himself once more without employment.

Riri was a light-hearted youth,

and he enjoyed his leisure. He danced, bathed and played tennis. It was thus that he made the acquaintance of a girl who had recently come to live at Le Havre. Her father had been a captain in the colonial army, and on his death her mother had returned to Le Havre, which was her native place. Marie-Louise was then eighteen. She had spent almost all her life in Tonkin. This gave her an exotic attraction for the young men who had never been out of France in their lives, and first Riri, then Jean, fell in love with her. Perhaps that was inevitable; it was certainly unfortunate.

She was a well-brought-up girl, an only child, and her mother, besides her pension, had a little money of her own. It was evident that she could be pursued only with a view to marriage. Of course Riri, dependent for the while entirely on his father, could not make an offer that there was the least chance of Madame Meurice, Marie-Louise's mother, accepting; but having the whole day to himself he was able to see a great deal more of Marie-Louise than Jean could.

Madame Meurice was something of an invalid, so that Marie-Louise had more liberty than most French girls of her age and station. She knew that both Riri and Jean were in love with her, she liked them both and was pleased by their attentions, but she gave no sign that she was in love with either. It was impossible to tell which she preferred. She was well aware that Riri was not in a position to marry her.

"What did she look like?" I asked Jean Charvin.

"She was small, with a pretty little figure, with large gray eyes, a pale skin and soft, mouse-colored hair. She was rather like a little mouse. She was not beautiful, but pretty, in a quaint demure way; there was something very appealing about her. She was easy to get on with. She was simple and unaffected. You couldn't help feeling that she was reliable and would make anyone a good wife."

Jean and Riri hid nothing from one another, and Jean made no secret of the fact that he was in love with Marie-Louise. But Riri had met her first, and it was an understood thing between them that Jean should not stand in his way. At length she made her choice. One day Riri waited for Jean to come away from his office and told him that Marie-Louise had consented to marry him. They had arranged that as soon as he got a job his father should go to her mother and make the formal offer.

Jean was hard hit. It was not easy to listen with eager sympathy to the plans that the excitable and enchanted Riri made for the future. But he was

too much attached to Riri to feel angry with him; he knew how lovable he was, and he could not blame Marie-Louise. He tried with all his might to accept honestly the sacrifice he made on the altar of friendship.

"Why did she choose him rather than you?" I asked.

"He had immense vitality. He was the gayest, most amusing lad you ever met. His high spirits were infectious. You couldn't be dull in his company."

"He had pep," I smiled.

"And an incredible charm."

"Was he good-looking?"

"No, not very. He was shorter than me, slight and wiry; but he had a nice, good-humored face." Jean Charvin smiled rather pleasantly. "I think without any vanity I can say that I was better-looking than Riri."

But Riri did not get a job. His father, tired of keeping him in idleness, wrote to everyone he could think of, the members of his family and his friends in various parts of France, asking them if they could not find something, however modest, for Riri to do; and at last he got a letter from a cousin in Lyons who was in the silk business to say that his firm were looking for a young man to go out to Phnom-Penh, in Cambodia, where they had a branch, to buy native silk for them. If Riri was willing to take the job he could get it for him.

Though, like all French parents, Riri's hated him to emigrate, there seemed no help for it, and it was determined, although the salary was small, that he must go. He was not disinclined. Cambodia was not so far from Tonkin, and Marie-Louise must be familiar with the life. She had so often talked of it that he had come to the conclusion that she would be glad to go back to the East.

To his dismay she told him that nothing would induce her to. In the first place she could not desert her mother, whose health was obviously declining; and then, after having at last settled down in France, she was determined never again to leave it. She was sympathetic to Riri, but resolute. With nothing else in prospect his father would not hear of his refusing the offer; there was no help for it, he had to go. Jean hated losing him, but from the moment Riri told him his bad news, he had realized with an exulting heart that fate was playing into his hands. With Riri out of his way for five years at least and, unless he were incompetent, with the probability that he would settle in the East for good, Jean could not doubt that after a while Marie-Louise would marry him.

His circumstances, his settled, respectable position in Le Havre, where she could be near her mother, would make her think it very sensible; and when she was

no longer under the spell of Riri's charm there was no reason why her great liking for him should not turn to love. Life changed for him. After months of misery he was happy again, and though he kept them to himself he too now made great plans for the future. There was no need any longer to try not to love Marie-Louise.

Suddenly his hopes were shattered. One of the shipping firms at Le Havre had a vacancy, and it looked as though the application that Riri had quickly made would be favorably considered. A friend in the office told him that it was a certainty. It would settle everything. It was an old and conservative house, and it was well known that when you once got into it you were there for life. Jean Charvin was in despair, and the worst of it was that he had to keep his anguish to himself. One day the director of his own firm sent for him.

When he reached this point Jean stopped. A harassed look came into his eyes.

"I'm going to tell you something now that I've never told to anyone before. I'm an honest man, a man of principle. I'm going to tell you of the only discreditable action I've ever done in my life."

I must remind the reader here that Jean Charvin was wearing the pink-and-white stripes of the convict's uniform, with his number stenciled on his chest, and that he was serving a term of imprisonment for the murder of his wife.

"I couldn't imagine what the director wanted with me. He was sitting at his desk when I went into his office, and he gave me a searching look.

" 'I want to ask you a question of great importance,' he said. 'I wish you to treat it as confidential. I shall of course treat your answer as equally so.'

"I waited. He went on: 'You've been with us for a considerable time. I am very well satisfied with you, and there is no reason why you shouldn't reach a very good position in the firm. I put implicit confidence in you.'

" 'Thank you, sir,' I said. 'I will always try to merit your good opinion.'

" 'The question at issue is this. Monsieur Untel is proposing to engage Henri Renard. He is very particular about the character of his employees, and in this case it is essential that he shouldn't make a mistake. Part of Henri Renard's duties would be to pay the crews of the firm's ships, and many hundreds of thousand of francs will pass through his hands. I know that Henri Renard is your great friend and that your families have always been very intimate. I put you on your honor to tell me whether Mon-

sieur Untel would be justified in engaging this young man.'

"I saw at once what the question meant. If Riri got the job he would stay and marry Marie-Louise. If he didn't he would go out to Cambodia and I should marry her. I swear to you it was not I who answered. It was someone who stood in my shoes and spoke with my voice. I had nothing to do with the words that came from my mouth.

" '*Monsieur le directeur,*' I said, 'Henri and I have been friends all our lives. We have never been separated for a week. We went to school together; we shared our pocket money and our mistresses when we were old enough to have them; we did our military service together.'

" 'I know. You know him better than anyone in the world. That is why I ask you these questions.'

" 'It is not fair, *Monsieur le directeur.* You are asking me to betray my friend. I cannot, and I will not answer your questions.'

"The director gave me a shrewd smile. He thought himself much cleverer than he really was.

" 'Your answer does you credit, but it has told me all I wished to know.' Then he smiled kindly. I suppose I was pale, I daresay I was trembling a little. 'Pull yourself together, my dear boy; you're upset and I can understand it. Sometimes in life one is faced by a situation where honesty stands on the one side and loyalty on the other. Of course one mustn't hesitate, but the choice is bitter. I shall not forget your behavior in this case, and on behalf of Monsieur Untel I thank you.'

"I withdrew. Next morning Riri received a letter informing him that his services were not required, and a month later he sailed for the Far East."

Six months after this Jean Charvin and Marie-Louise were married. The marriage was hastened by the increasing gravity of Madame Meurice's illness. Knowing that she could not live long, she was anxious to see her daughter settled before she died. Jean wrote to Riri telling him the facts, and Riri wrote back warmly congratulating him. He assured him that he need have no compunctions on his behalf; when he had left France he realized that *he* could never marry Marie-Louise, and he was glad that Jean was going to. He was finding consolation at Phnom-Penh.

His letter was very cheerful. From the beginning Jean had told himself that Riri, with his mercurial temperament, would soon forget Marie-Louise, and his letter looked as if he had already done so. He had done him no irreparable injury. It was a justification. For if *he* had lost Marie-Louise he would have

died; with him it was a matter of life and death.

For a year Jean and Marie-Louise were extremely happy. Madame Meurice died, and Marie-Louise inherited a couple of hundred thousand francs; but with the depression and the unstable currency they decided not to have a child till the economic situation was less uncertain. Marie-Louise was a good and frugal housekeeper. She was an affectionate, amiable and satisfactory wife.

She was placid. This before he married her had seemed to Jean a rather charming trait, but as time wore on it was borne in upon him that her placidity came from a certain lack of emotional ardor. It concealed no depth. He had always thought she was like a little mouse; there was something mouselike in her furtive reticences; she was oddly serious about trivial matters and could busy herself indefinitely with things that were of no consequence.

She had her own tiny little set of interests and they left no room in her pretty sleek head for any others. She sometimes began a novel, but seldom cared to finish it. Jean was obliged to admit to himself that she was rather dull. The uneasy thought came to him that perhaps it had not been worthwhile to do a dirty trick for her sake. It began to worry him. He missed Riri. He tried to persuade himself that what was done was done and that he had really not been a free agent, but he could not quite still the prickings of his conscience. He wished now that when the director of his firm spoke to him he had answered differently.

Then a terrible thing happened. Riri contracted typhoid fever and died. It was a frightful shock for Jean. It was a shock to Marie-Louise too; she paid Riri's parents the proper visit of condolence, but she neither ate less heartily nor slept less soundly. Jean was exasperated by her composure.

"Poor chap, he was always so gay," she said, "he must have hated dying. But why did he go out there? I told him the climate was bad. It killed my father, and I knew what I was talking about."

Jean felt that he had killed him. If he had told the director all the good he knew of Riri, knew as no one else in the world did, he would have got the post and would now be alive and well.

"I shall never forgive myself," he thought, "I shall never be happy again. Oh, what a fool I was, and what a cad!"

He wept for Riri. Marie-Louise sought to comfort him. She was a kind little thing and she loved him.

"You mustn't take it too hardly. After all you wouldn't have

seen him for five years, and you'd have found him so changed that there wouldn't have been anything between you any more. He would have been a stranger to you. I've seen that sort of thing happen so often. You'd have been delighted to see him, and in half an hour you'd have discovered that you had nothing to say to one another."

"I daresay you're right," he sighed.

"He was too scatter-brained ever to have amounted to anything very much. He never had your firmness of character and your clear, solid intellect."

He knew what she was thinking. What would have been her position now if she had followed Riri to Indo-China and found herself at twenty-one a widow with nothing but her own two hundred thousand francs to live on? It was a lucky escape, and she congratulated herself on her good sense. Jean was a husband of whom she could be proud. He was earning good money. Jean was tortured by remorse. What he had suffered before was nothing to what he suffered now. The anguish that the recollection of his treachery caused him was worse than a physical pain gnawing at his vitals.

It would assail him suddenly when he was in the middle of his work and twist his heart-strings with a violent pang. His agony was such that he craved for relief, and it was only by an effort of all his will that he prevented himself from making a full confession to Marie-Louise. But he knew how she would take it. She would not be shocked, she would think it rather a clever trick and be even subtly flattered that for her sake he had been guilty of a despicable act. She could not help him. He began to dislike her. For it was for her that he had done the shameful thing, and what was she? An ordinary, commonplace, rather calculating little woman.

"What a fool I've been," he repeated.

He did not even find her pretty any more. He knew now that she was terribly stupid. But of course she was not to blame for that, she was not to blame because he had been false to his friend; and he forced himself to be as sweet and tender to her as he had always been.

He did whatever she wanted. She had only to express a wish for him to fulfill it if it was in his power. He tried to pity her, he tried to be tolerant; he told himself that from her own petty standpoint she was a good wife, methodical, saving, and in her manner, dress and appearance, a credit to a respectable young man. All that was true; but it was on her account that Riri had died, and he loathed her. She bored him to distraction.

Though he said nothing,

though he was kind, amiable and indulgent, he could often have killed her. When he did, however, it was almost without meaning to. It was ten months after Riri's death, and Riri's parents, Monsieur and Madame Renard, gave a party to celebrate the engagement of their daughter. Jean had seen little of them since Riri's death and he did not want to go. But Marie-Louise said they must. He had been Riri's greatest friend and it would be a grave lack of politeness on Jean's part not to attend an important celebration in the family. She had a keen sense of social obligation.

"Besides, it'll be a distraction for you. You've been in poor spirits for so long, a little amusement will do you good. There'll be champagne, won't there? Madame Renard doesn't like spending money, but on an occasion like this she'll have to sacrifice herself."

Marie-Louise chuckled slyly when she thought what a wrench it would be to Madame Renard to unloose her purse strings.

The party had been very gay. It gave Jean a nasty turn when he found they were using Riri's old room for the women to put their wraps in and the men their coats. There was plenty of champagne. Jean drank a great deal to drown the bitter remorse that tormented him. He wanted to deaden the sound of his ears of Riri's laugh and to shut his eyes to the good humor of his shining glance. It was three o'clock when they got home. Next day was Sunday, so Jean had no work to go to. They slept late. The rest I can tell in Jean Charvin's own words.

"I had a headache when I woke. Marie-Louise was not in bed. She was sitting at the dressing table brushing her hair. I've always been very keen on physical culture, and I was in the habit of doing exercises every morning. I didn't feel very much inclined to do them that morning. But after all that champagne I thought I'd better. I got out of bed and took up my Indian clubs. Our bedroom was fairly large, and there was plenty of room to swing them between the bed and the dressing table where Marie-Louise was sitting.

"I did my usual exercises. Marie-Louise had started a little while before having her hair cut differently, quite short, and I thought it repulsive. From the back she looked like a boy, and the stubble of cropped hair on her neck made me feel rather sick. She put down her brushes and began to powder her face. She gave a nasty little laugh.

" 'What are you laughing at?' I asked.

" 'Madame Renard. That was the same dress she wore at our wedding; she'd had it dyed and done over, but it didn't deceive me. I'd have known it anywhere.'

"It was such a stupid remark, it infuriated me. I was seized with rage, and with all my might I hit her over the head with my Indian club. I broke her skull, apparently, and she died two days later in the hospital without recovering consciousness."

He paused for a moment. I handed him a cigarette and lit another myself.

"I was glad she did. We could never have lived together again, and it would have been very hard to explain my action."

"Very."

"I was arrested and tried for murder. Of course I swore it was an accident, I said the club had slipped out of my hand, but the medical evidence was against me. The prosecution proved that such an injury as Marie-Louise had suffered could only have been caused by a violent and deliberate blow. Fortunately for me they could find no motive. The public prosecutor tried to make out that I had been jealous of the attentions some man had paid her at the party and that we had quarreled on that account, but the man he mentioned swore that he had done nothing to arouse my suspicions and others at the party testified that we had left the best of friends.

"They found on the dressing table an unpaid dressmaker's bill, and the prosecutor suggested that we had quarreled about that, but I was able to prove that Marie-Louise paid for her clothes out of her own money, so that the bill could not possibly have been the cause of a dispute. Witnesses came forward and said that I had always been kind to Marie-Louise. We were generally looked upon as a devoted couple. My character was excellent, and my employer spoke in the highest terms of me.

"I was never in danger of losing my head, and at one moment I thought I had a chance of getting off altogether. In the end I was sentenced to six years. I don't regret what I did, for from that day, all the time I was in prison awaiting my trial, and since, while I've been here, I've ceased to worry about Riri. If I believed in ghosts I'd be inclined to say that Marie-Louises' death has laid Riri's. Anyhow, my conscience is at rest, and after all the torture I've suffered I can assure you that everything I've gone through since is worth it. I feel I can now look the world in the face again."

I know that this is a fantastic story; I am by way of being a realist, and in the stories I write I seek verisimilitude. I eschew the bizarre as scrupulously as I avoid the whimsical. If this had been a tale that I was inventing I would certainly have made it more probable. As it is, unless I had heard it with my own ears I am not sure that I should believe it. I do not know whether

Jean Charvin told me the truth, and yet the words with which he closed his final visit to me had a convincing ring. I had asked him what were his plans for the future.

"I have friends working for me in France," he answered. "A great many people thought at the time that I was the victim of a grave miscarriage of justice. The director of my firm is convinced that I was unjustly condemned; and I may get a reduction of my sentence. Even if I don't, I think I can count upon getting back to France at the end of my six years. You see, I'm making myself very useful here. The accounts were very badly kept when I took them over, and I've got them in apple-pie order.

"There have been leakages, and I am convinced that if they'll give me a free hand, I can stop them. The commandant likes me and I'm certain that he'll do everything he can for me. At the worst I shan't be much over thirty when I get back."

"But won't you find it rather difficult to get work?"

"A clever accountant like me, and a man who's honest and industrious, can always get work. Of course I shan't be able to live in Le Havre, but the director of my firm has business connections at Lille and Lyons and Marseilles. He's promised to do something for me. No, I look forward to the years to come with a good deal of confidence. I shall settle down somewhere, and as soon as I'm comfortably fixed up I shall marry. After what I've been through I want a home."

We were sitting in one of the corners of the veranda that surrounded my house in order to get any draught there might be, and on the north side I had left a jalousie undrawn. The strip of sky you saw with a single coconut tree on one side, its green foliage harsh against the blue, looked like an advertisement for a tropical cruise. Jean Charvin's eyes searched the distance as though he sought to see the future.

"But next time I marry," he said thoughtfully, "I shan't marry for love. I shall marry for money."

death stops at a tourist camp

by . . . Leslie Ford

To a girl who has never been in love a tourist camp may be a haven of bright romanticism—or a sanctuary for a killer at large.

JOAN ACHESON closed the door of the tiny white cabin almost concealed under gorgeous crimson ramblers, and leaned against it, eyeing the girl opposite her with a lifted brow.

"The trouble with you, my pet," she said softly, "is that you're scared—utterly and literally pea-green."

The girl opposite her had curly yellow hair and odd-colored eyes, rather greener than gray, and she wore a suede-cloth polo shirt, high at the neck, and a very smart felt hat. She had one hand behind her and the other stuffed into the pocket of her flannel skirt. In fact, she was exactly like the girl leaning against the door, her slim feet planted firmly on the grass rug on the floor—except that her hair was not so golden and her full lips not so red.

The mirrors in the cabins of the Shady Bridge Tourist Camp — one hundred miles from Richmond, Virginia—were both mildewed and slightly undulating. It was therefore not surprising

Leslie Ford has written so many top-echelon mystery novels that it's a little hard to see the peaks for the snow-capped splendor of the mountain line in general. Our own favorites are perhaps THE BAHAMAS MURDER CASE *(Scribners) and* MURDER IS THE PAYOFF. *But now that we've been privileged to bring you a short novel from his gifted pen that moves so implacably to a chilling denouement we're not quite sure we are capable of picking and choosing. When you're frozen to the marrow you remember only the story responsible, and seek excitedly to recommend it to others. That we now do, right pridefully.*

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that Joan Acheson, regarding herself in one of them, did look decidedly pea-green.

However, she *was* scared. Furthermore, she was willing, now that it was too late to do anything about it, to admit it. She had been so sure she could make Richmond and a proper hotel before dark . . . and she could have, if she hadn't had a flat just after leaving Bristol. And she had promised her father she wouldn't drive after dark. Not that anything could have happened to her in an hour and a quarter, but she *had* promised. Furthermore, it had been darker than she had counted on when she asked the service station attendant at the crossroads about the road, and there was a detour through miles of back lanes.

"If I was you, miss," he had said, "I'd stop at Mis' Dixon's place just up the way. They're mighty nice folks, and it's clean."

Joan had been doubtful. It was a tossup which her father would dislike more—her traveling deserted roads in the dark, or putting up at a tourist camp that he —and she — knew nothing about.

"It'll be all right, miss. A sixteen cylinder Luxor's just gone there." The man grinned.

Joan laughed. "If it's good enough for sixteen cylinders, it's good enough for eight—is that it? Maybe you're right. Good night."

It wasn't the sixteen cylinders that had made up her mind for her. It was a dark road, a no doubt quite imaginary rattle somewhere in the bowels of her sports roadster, and the large automobile association sign over the side of the road. That at least identified it.

She had driven in across a shaded bridge through a line of old pollarded cedars, and here she was, the sole if temporary proprietress of a little rose-covered cabin, with a sign hanging over the door that said "Florida" in white letters. "The lady in Florida," the colored boy who brought her bag in, had called her.

Standing there in front of the door, she felt more like a babe in Timbuktu. It was astonishing how silent it was all around her. Silent, and dark, in spite of the racket the frogs were kicking up.

Joan tossed her hat on the dresser, tousled her mop of bright curly hair, and looked at her watch. It was quarter of ten. Everybody else was in bed, or so the good-looking young man who showed her where to park her car had told her. The young man, in fact, had reassured her—his grin, to be exact, and a pair of pleasant brown eyes, which were about all she'd seen of him. But he was gone now, and the frogs' dismal dirge didn't make it any more cheerful.

She sat down on the edge of

the narrow bed and looked around. It *was* clean, and it was amusingly furnished, with a painted dresser and chairs and a lamp with a chintz shade. On the other side was a narrow door leading to a private shower and lavatory, and there were two small windows, both of them open, with chintz blinds drawn up at the bottom by cords secured on a hook at the side. At least, nobody could look in, and that was something. Still Joan did not undress.

Finally she took her shoes off, and dropped them firmly with a crash. "You're not going to be a complete fool," she said severely.

She reached over for her handbag. "Oh, gosh!" she groaned. She had left it in the car, on the seat. If it was gone, she'd probably have to wash dishes for her night's lodging.

She thrust her shoes back on her feet and rushed to the door, stepping down out of Florida and peering around to get her bearings. Little white cabins stretched in a row under the maple trees. Iowa was next to her on one side, New York on the other. Across the lawn was a corral of parked cars with a light burning over the entrance. She closed her door and ran across, wishing a little that the young man woud appear. Not that she couldn't find her car alone.

It was very dark, and dismally quiet, barring the frogs. Joan stumbled a little on the uneven turf, and decided that if she walked, and didn't try to run, she wouldn't be so nervous. She glanced behind her. That was probably a mistake, too. You didn't glance behind you because you were afraid of bears. You were afraid of bears because you glanced behind you. A good bear would be rather reassuring, she thought; because the thing she suddenly saw, or thought she saw under a tree, did not look like a bear at all.

At first she thought the light there was a firefly. With so many moving lights it didn't look too solid. But when it dissolved in a shower of fallen sparks against the trunk of the tree, she knew someone was there, and furthermore that he had put out his cigarette so she would not notice him. She tried not to run or let her heart pound against her ribs as she gained the white-painted arch and peered around in the dark trying to find her car. There was a flashlight on the seat, too. It would be a relief to have that.

The light on a pole over the parking space shone dimly in the night, but it was enough to show up the shiny surface of the enormous car parked alongside of hers. They were parked quite close together, so that she had to step on the running board and put her hand on the door to get her own door unlocked and open.

It occurred to her for an instant that her bag would really be safer there than inside the cabin. But she took it and the flashlight, climbed out, and closed the door. Then she stopped, her breath coming in quick gusts. For something inside the big car moved.

For a moment Joan Acheson's heart pounded madly. She was standing on the running board of the big car—had to, to get out, because its fenders were too close to those of her own car for her to squeeze through. Her first idea was to run. Then she had an irresistible impulse to look in the dark window. She was probably wrong. It was extraordinary how much oftener she was wrong than right.

She lifted the flashlight and turned its beam through the broad window. Then she gasped and lowered it instantly. The car was empty.

Joan stood there for a moment paralyzed. Then she shook herself impatiently. "You're crazy!" she said. "Why shouldn't it be empty?"

She dashed back across the dark lawn as fast as she could go, burst into her cabin door, slammed it behind her, and turned the key. Then she turned around—and stopped short in her tracks, staring about her.

She could not have been away five minutes at the longest. But her things were entirely gone.

Joan Acheson, panic-stricken, looked from the narrow bed with its turned-down cover to the chintz blinds drawn up from the bottom, the chintz lamp shade, the grass rug, the painted dresser and chairs, the narrow door leading to the shower. She put her cold hands to her burning forehead, crept across and stared into the mirror, clinging to the dresser, wondering if she had gone out of her mind. Then she crept back to the door, unlocked it, and looked outside.

It was very dark. She searched among the fireflies for one that was solider than the rest, but whoever was out there had not lighted another cigarette. She stepped out and turned the flashlight up on the sign over the door and breathed a great sigh of relief.

This cabin was New York. Of course, they all looked just the same, she thought. She ran to the next cabin. The door stood open an inch, and through the crack she could see her coat on the hanger. Suddenly as she stood there she felt a quick, inexplicable wave of terror, as if something was just behind her in the night.

The hand she instinctively stretched out to the door was paralyzed with fear. She whirled about, back against the white wall, and flashed the beam of her flashlight around the grounds. There was nothing there only the maple trees and the other cabins.

She was about to lower the flash when something caught her eye. At the foot of the nearest maple, between the big roots, something—a tiny spot—glittered brightly, and beside it rose a thin thread of smoke from a short tube of gray ash.

Joan stared at it a moment, then edged open the door with her shoulder, backed into the cabin, closed the door quickly, and bolted it. Then she turned around to survey things inside; and her lips parted in dismay.

She had left her traveling bag closed at the foot of her bed. It was closed now, but it was at the head of the bed; and her hat, which she had left mashed in front of the mirror, was still there. *But it was carefully smoothed out.*

She stared at the bag and the hat incredulously for a moment, then tiptoed to the small door leading to the shower and pushed it open. There was nothing there. She bent down and looked under the bed. There was nothing there, either.

Joan sat down on the edge of the bed. Someone had been in there while she was out. That was clear. Unless, of course, she *had* left the bag at the head of the bed. She shook her head slowly. It wouldn't do. It might have been all right except for the hat. She had never been known to push out the folds of a felt hat when she took it off—as her mother had pointed out to her for practically seventeen years assuming she had begun at two, which was reasonable enough.

"Well, my pet, she said—aloud, because it was a little reassuring to hear somebody talking—"you might as well plan to sit up all night."

If anything did happen to her, she had left tracks enough, anyway. The flat, and the boy at the service station. Unless—and a cold shiver went down her already clammy back—it was a plot and the boy was in on it. But that was pretty absurd. People didn't just run into plots, not actually.

Joan took off her skirt and put on her dressing gown. Then she got under the covers. For a moment she lay there with the light on, and then turned it off. There was no use being a fool. Nevertheless, she held her flash tightly in her hand.

"I'll stay awake, anyway," she said to herself, and went instantly to sleep.

Suddenly a heavy thud brought her sharply to. She sat bolt upright, her breath strangling in her throat, listening with every nerve. There was nothing—no sound. Then she remembered, and felt in sudden alarm for the flashlight. It was gone. She reached across the little square table for the lamp, and turned it on. It was almost five. Joan rubbed her eyes.

She glanced at the door. It was

still bolted, the shades were still drawn. Her handbag was still on the table, her traveling bag and hat in their places. The flashlight was beside her shoes on the floor under the bed. Joan took a deep breath and smiled. That was what had waked her—the light dropping out of her hand and rolling off onto the floor.

It was very early, but it was just as well, probably, to be up and on her way. She should, she realized, have telegraphed her father the night before. Still, if it was five now, she could be in Richmond well in time to call him while he was at breakfast in the garden. So Joan Acheson jumped out of bed.

II

Julius Jones put her ham and eggs and toast down on the table under the mimosa tree and filled her cup from the old silver pot.

"I'm starving," Joan said, picking up a fork.

Julius Jones grinned virtually from ear to ear. "Ah could eat a mule's eah frah'd in grease," he said fervently. "People git up too eah'ly in this yere business fo' me. Ah ain' nevah had time t' finish mah breakfas, yet, since Ah been heah."

"You'd better go and finish it now," Joan smiled. "I don't want anything else. This is awfully good. I've got my bag right there."

"Ah'll put it on youah cah, miss. Hadn' Ah bettah see if you done lef' anythin'?"

Joan waved a hand airily. "Don't bother. I looked around."

She gave him half a dollar. Julius beamed. He brought the car out of the parking corral and put her bag in it. Then Joan saw him heading towards the cabins and realized, with a sigh, that he was going to have a look, anyway. What was it about her, she wondered, that made porters and maids, friends and parents, always assume she was leaving something behind? She usually was, but anyway . . . Joan raised he coffee cup and put it to her lips.

Then a sudden scream that had in it all the terror of the trackless jungle echoed quivering through the still air. Joan put her cup down hastily and looked around.

Julius Jones was flying out of her cabin as if a dozen fiends were at his heels. The young man with the pleasant eyes came running out of the big brick house. He caught the colored boy by the shoulder.

"What's the matter with you?" he said curtly.

Julius Jones pointed a trembling finger first at Joan, then at the cabin, tore himself loose, and ran on. Young Mr. Jeff Dixon stared after him for a moment, cast a briefer glance at Joan, and ran across the turf to the cabin. Joan stared, too. She got up hast-

ily. It was obviously impossible that she could have left anything in the cabin, but, whatever it was, it couldn't have been as terrifying as all that.

As she ran across the grass she saw a white-haired woman come hurrying over the lawn. Joan got a brief impression of a sweet, careworn face and a fluttering blue shawl.

Jeff Dixon had stepped into the cabin, and was backing out when Joan came up. He turned round abruptly. The brown eyes that looked into hers were anything but pleasant. Joan stopped short, staring at him, astonished. He was staring at her, his eyes hard, flat disks, his jaw white-ribbed and tight, his lips a thin steely line. The contempt and loathing in his face stung her like a lash across the eyes. She drew back, bewildered and a little frightened without knowing why, and she would not have been Joan Acheson if she had been angry, too.

Then she pushed past him and looked through the door.

Lying huddled in a disgusting heap on the floor under the edge of the bed was a large man. He was very inert and, staring at him, Joan knew he was dead before she saw the thin, dark line of dried blood that smeared the floor under his coat.

She turned slowly around to the young man.

"That's why you wanted to sneak out early, is it?" he demanded.

The blank astonishment and fright on Joan Acheson's face turied slowly to sickening, desperate horror. "What . . . what are you talking about?"

Jeff Dixon looked at her with icy fury, tinged with a perverse sort of admiration for her acting. Anyone not versed in the deceitful ways of woman in general, he told himself, would have been taken in at once by her trembling lips and wide slate-gray eyes.

But Jeff Dixon knew women. He still writhed when he remembered a pair of innocent blue eyes looking up at him, and their owner saying, "But *Jeff*, you couldn't expect me to marry a boy whose mother runs a *tourist camp!* I always thought it was one of those old colonial estates, and it was just *money* you didn't have."

It flashed into his mind now. Joan saw his white face flush and his eyes kindle.

"I'm talking about the dead body you were trying to sneak off and leave on us," he said angrily.

She stared at him in horrified bewilderment. "You — you're crazy!"

"Yes? That's the cabin you were in, isn't it? And there's the dead body!"

Joan stared at him, still speechless. It was a simple and unanswerable statement of the whole business. Unanswerable, that is, until Dr. Harp came in. For as

far as Joan knew it was actually, literally, true.

And Jeff Dixon thought suddenly of his mother, coming across the lawn from the big house now, anxious-eyed, her white hair shining in the sun . . . and what it had cost her in effort and sacrifice to make the Shady Bridge Tourist Camp a paying proposition. First there had been the business of the Roanoke bank teller, then this. It would wreck the whole works. You couldn't have fugitive embezzlers and then murder in a tourist camp and expect nice people to go on stopping at it.

The little hum and buzz of excited talk had risen slowly, and Joan, looking helplessly about her, saw the people coming, from the big brick house and out of the little cabins up and down the row, crowding around now with curious, avid eyes.

Jeff Dixon spoke curtly: "Won't you all go back to your cabins? There's been a—an accident here. Your breakfast is ready when you want it."

Joan looked in a daze from one to another of the strange faces closing in around her. Questions pelted her numb brain like tiny pellets of hail: "What's happened?" "What's she done?" "Did he say *murdered?*"

A booming, confident voice rose above the hum: "What's up, young fellow?"

A large man in pajamas and a striped wool dressing gown, with iron-gray hair and an outthrust jaw, started toward the door of the cabin.

Jeff Dixon stepped in front of him. "Sorry, Mr. Baylor. You can't go in there."

Then he spoke patiently. "This girl was getting ready to leave, when the colored boy looked in the cabin and saw a dead man there. That's all there is to it so far. The state police usually drop in here about now, or we'll phone. Now please go back, will you?"

Joan did not see any of the people actually move, but suddenly the space between them and her was much larger. Only the big man held his ground.

"I think the young fellow's being a bit high-handed, Miss—"

Joan whispered her name automatically.

"My name's Baylor," the big man said, "Howard Baylor. If there's anything I can do, little lady—" He hesitated, a natural caution asserting itself. "That *is* your cabin?"

Joan nodded helplessly. "Yes," she whispered. "I—can't understand it."

Baylor looked up at the green board with the white "Florida" on it, and back at Joan. Doubt seeped into his shrewd eyes.

A woman's voice spoke up from the outskirts of the circle. "You keep out of this, Howard, and let the police handle it."

Joan looked around at her. There was something in the sharp hostility of the woman's voice that for the first time made her realize that this was not merely embarrassing. She was actually in danger.

"You come along. We'll get out of here before this is spread over the front page of every paper in the country."

Joan looked at her, hardly understanding. Mrs. Baylor was fiftyish, stout, with a sagging, heavy face.

Mr. Baylor eased back into the crowd a little uncertainly.

"Sorry!" Jeff Dixon said. "Nobody can leave this place until the police get here."

Mrs. Baylor's eyes snapped. "You come along, Howard! Don't pay any attention to that impertinent young fool!"

Another voice, drawling and rather bored, rose from beside Mrs. Baylor. "Oh, he's probably right, you know, Mother."

Joan's eyes rested on a young man in a neat flannel dressing gown.

"You keep your mouth shut," Mr. Baylor said curtly. "Your mother doesn't need your advice."

"That's all right, Harold." Mrs. Baylor nodded sympathetically to her son.

"If you'll all go and get dressed, you'll probably get away quicker," Jeff Dixon said patiently. "I'm sorry about it, but somebody had been killed here. We've got to wait for the police."

As the little circle broke up Mrs. Dixon came up to them.

"There's a man dead in 'Florida'," Jeff said quietly. "Where *she* stayed last night."

Mrs. Dixon gazed incredulously at Joan. "This girl?" she said. "Who is the man?"

Jeff looked at Joan and waited. "Well?" he demanded coldly. "Who is it?"

Joan gulped. "I — I don't know!" she blurted out. Then she caught herself quickly. She musn't let herself get hysterical. "How should I know?" she added more calmly.

"Great Scott! He's under your bed!"

For an instant their eyes met and held, the anger rising in them like storm signals.

"I can't help that!" Joan said hotly. Her eyes blazed green venom. "I tell you I never saw the man before in my life!"

"Yes? Queer, isn't it?"

Mrs. Dixon put her hand urgently on his arm. "Don't, Jeff," she said. "There must be some mistake. This child—that's too dreadful!"

"I'll say it is . . . Hello, there's Carter."

A motorcycle streaked around the bend and across the bridge, and came to a stop in a cloud of dust. Jeff Dixon went forward to meet the state policeman. Joan saw him nod back at her as they

talked. She saw the policeman staring at her—a man of thirty-five or so with dark hair and a rugged, sunburnt face. They walked across to the cabin. Jeff pushed open the door.

The policeman said "Gee!" and turned and stared back at the girl standing trim and erect. He then went into the cabin. The hand protruding stiffly from under the mussed bed seemed to beckon like a ghastly relic. Carter lifted the sheet hanging down over the dead, stary-eyed face. He let it fall quickly, straightened up.

"Don't touch anything," he said. "The C.A.'s on his way. Who's the dame?"

Jeff shook his head. "She got in after nine, alone, and slept here. Then she tried to get away first thing this morning. It burns me up. Mother's had a rotten time trying to make this place go, and just when things are picking up this had to happen."

Carter nodded. He knew the Dixons and the job Mrs. Dixon had had after her husband died to send Jeff to college.

"Who is the guy?"

"That's the crazy thing about it. I never saw him before. I mean, he's not one of the guests that stayed here last night."

Carter looked at him, puzzled. "Sure he didn't come in with her, or the other folks?"

Jeff shook his head. Carter left the cabin and walked across the grass to where Joan was looking out towards the road.

"Look here, sister," he said.

Joan Acheson was as wilful and headstrong as a thoroughbred colt. She could also be eminently level-headed and cool when she had to be. Moreover, this was not her first encounter with a state policeman, although it was the first where anything worse than seventy miles an hour was involved. She turned calmly around, and met Carter's eyes. And then a gleam of recognition came into both their faces.

"Hello!" Carter said. "It's you, is it? Thought you were going to Richmond to see your dying aunt."

Joan flushed brick-red.

"I guess it was your dying uncle, eh?"

Joan's heart sank. It just went to show. You ought never to tell a fib.

She tried to steady the voice that seemed suddenly very shaky. "I'm sorry."

"Yeah; I'll bet, What's your name?"

Joan looked at him, and past him to the hard, resentful eyes of Jeff Dixon. Something inside her went cold.

"I think I'd better phone my father," she said.

"Yeah," said Carter. "I guess he's dying, too. Listen, sister—no more tricks. Understand? You answer questions. When there's phoning to do, we'll do it."

Joan clenched her teeth firmly. This was getting impossible. After all, she thought desperately, the whole thing was absurd—terrifyingly absurd.

"What's your name, sister?"

Joan's eyes shot out green sparks. "I'm not your sister, Officer. And, what's more I'm not going to answer any questions till my father gets here."

"Okay, sister. You can just go and cool off in one of them cabins till the C.A. gets here. How's that?"

"That's swell!" Joan said hotly.

Carter looked a little taken aback. "Look here," he said. "All I got to do is take your license number and phone Headquarters, and I'll have your life history in five minutes."

"Then do it, and shut up about it!" The hot tears stung her eyelids.

"Okay, sister. I'll do just that. You keep an eye on her, Jeff."

Joan watched him head for the house. She felt suddenly like a circus ballon with all the air let out of it. She bit her lips impatiently. She ought to have given him her name. She was acting like an idiot.

Joan choked back a little sob and sat down abruptly. The idea that she, Joan Acheson, could get mixed up in anything of the sort was so preposterous that she couldn't actually grasp it. Yet it was true. And nobody even knew she was Joan Acheson. She glanced back at the house. The state policeman was doing a double-quick towards them. His face was lighted with triumph.

"No wonder you didn't want to give your name," he said. "You thought you could pull something, didn't you?" He looked over at Jeff. "Her old man's Judge Acheson. Will the C.A. eat that up? They're as friendly as two rattlesnakes."

A hot, angry flush darkened Jeff Dixon's face. He had a sudden impulse to crack Carter on the jaw. After all, she was only a kid. He looked around at her. She was staring straight ahead, her face very white. The poor little devil, Jeff thought. He took a step towards her. She looked up, startled and her wide-set eyes turned a sudden, hostile cat-green. Jeff remembered the other girl. He shrugged, and turned back to the state policeman, his expression somber.

III

At first Joan hardly noticed the chubby, bright-faced little man who was coming hurriedly across the lawn from the big house. Then she noticed him chiefly because his round face, with its round, gold-rimmed spectacles with thread wrapped around the nosepiece, was so comically distressed—and because of the way Mrs. Dixon's

anxious face smoothed out when she caught sight of him.

He listened silently, with pursed lips, to Mrs. Dixon's account of what had happened.

"You must help her, Doctor," Mrs. Dixon entreated.

The little man smiled at her and patted her shoulder. He looked searchingly for a very long time at Joan. Then he struck the ground with his gold-headed cane.

"Oh, nonsense!" he said and said it with so much conviction that the state policeman looked up a little nettled.

"All right, Professor," he said. "Have a look for yourself."

The professor nodded. Joan watched him stump off, open the cabin door, and stand there a moment peering in. Then he came back to them hurriedly.

"But surely!" he said to Carter. "This child? Why, it's—it's nonsense!"

Carter shrugged. The little man calmly pulled up a hickory chair by a table, propped his gold-headed cane carefully against it, sat down, and looked at Joan earnestly.

"My dear," he said, "this is all silly. I hope you'll let me help you."

He fished in his inside coat pocket, brought out a card, and handed it to Joan. She took it automatically. It read: *Porteus Alexander Harp, A. M., Ph. D., D. Sc.* And, in the lower, left-hand corner: *Professor of Geology, Saginaw College, Saginaw, Michigan.*

Afterwards it seemed incredible to Joan that anyone so amazing should have walked into her life so informally and with such momentous consequences.

Dr. Harp smiled expectantly at her, and Joan managed a smile in return.

He nodded approvingly. "That's the ticket," he said. "Now, my child, Mrs. Dixon says you deny any knowledge of this —affair."

Joan nodded helplessly.

"I thought so," Dr. Harp said. "Now, in that case, my dear, and in my opinion, the thing to do is to put into action what we call the scientific method." He looked at her with a sort of owlish intentness, "I take it you really didn't stab this man—not even in a fit of temporary insanity nor in self-defense?"

Joan stared at him.

"I suggest that," Dr. Harp went on, "because I'm told they are the best defenses a young woman can offer."

"I—" Joan said. Her brain whirled. Then she pulled herself together with a great effort. "Listen, Dr. Harp," she said, as firmly as she could. "You don't understand. *I didn't do it. Please believe me!*"

Dr. Harp nodded serenely. "One of the features of the scientific method," he said, "is the

necessity of having one's premises correct. Because, if we proceed from inaccurate premises, why, then our conclusions are bound to be inaccurate."

Joan glanced covertly at Mrs. Dixon and Jeff. Their attitudes—even Jeff's—seemed to be indicating, in some odd, matter-of-fact way, that everything would be all right now that Dr. Harp was there.

Dr. Harp nodded to himself. "Very well," he said. "Roman Numeral One: You didn't kill the man in there." He pulled a worn envelope out of his pocket aid made a note. "Roman Numeral Two: You did sleep in the cabin last night?"

Joan nodded.

"Very well—Roman Numeral Three: You did not see a dead man under your bed. Correct?"

"Correct," Joan said. After all, it couldn't possibly make things worse.

"In that case, and in my opinion," said Dr. Harp, "there could have been no dead man there when you left the cabin."

He raised his hand quickly. "However — Roman Numeral Four: There *is* a dead man there. Capital Letter A: He has been there for some time, because the blood on the floor around him is dry. Capital Letter B: He has not been there for a great period of time, because he does not yet appear to be in rigor mortis. And Capital Letter C: There is only one entrance through which a body can, One: enter, or, Two: be introduced, into the cabin.

"Therefore—Arabic Numeral One under Capital Letter C—the body was not introduced through that entrance—namely, the front, and in fact only, door—*after* 'X' left the cabin—that's you, my dear—for the simple reason that there were witnesses watching that entrance all the time. That's you again. Correct?"

Joan drew a deep breath. "Yes," she said. "That's correct." She knew it was, and yet, at the same time, it couldnt be.

"Then, where were we?" Dr. Harp adjusted his spectacles and looked down at his notes. Then he looked at Joan with a troubled frown. "But," he said, "in that case, and according to the scientific method, you must have killed the man in your cabin."

"But I didn't" Joan said.

"I know. And that shows us that something's wrong. But not the method. Depend on it my dear. The scientific method can't be wrong. It follows simple logic.

He bent over his envelope and went back over the outline he had made, shaking his head, pursing and unpursing his lips.

A sudden burst of speed in the road behind them made Joan turn in time to see a large car, preceded by a motorcycle, cross the bridge and pull up in the drive. As it stopped she recognized the commonwealth attorney in it.

With him were half a dozen men.

The Honorable Milton Bassford, Commonwealth Attorney for Bedford County, Virginia, strode across the grounds toward the cabin without so much as a glance her way. Jeff and Dr. Harp were following the commonwealth attorney. Joan shuddered. For the first time she felt a sense of grim tragedy waiting behind the gay, rose-covered little facade.

Joan opened her bag and took out her vanity. It came to her as a shock that the face gazing back at her in the mirror was still her own, and still the same. She patted her nose with the puff, and looked up quickly, hearing someone coming.

"Oh," she said. "It's you, is it?"

Jeff Dixon flushed angrily. "Yes," he said. "It is. And how in thunder you can sit there and powder your nose, I don't see."

Joan closed her vanity and put it back in her bag, swallowing down the aching anxiety that kept swelling in her throat.

"What do you expect me to do?" she inquired, with an elaborate nonchalance that anyone but Jeff Dixon would have seen through instantly. "Sit here and wring my hands? I'm not going to. If they'd let me go and phone my father—"

"He's been phoned to. He had to go to Knoxville. They're trying to locate him."

"Oh," said Joan.

Jeff moved aside as the commonwealth attorney came up across the lawn.

"How do you do, Miss Acheson?" he said. "I don't think we've ever met, but I know your father."

The Honorable Milton Bassford's hand was cold and slightly damp. Joan looked at him steadily, seeing a pair of shrewd, hard eyes and a hawklike beak over a long, grooved, predatory upper lip. His chin was cleft, too, and gave a curiously sardonic look to his thin, wide mouth.

"Sit down," he said. "Sit down, Professor."

Dr. Harp drew his chair a little closer to Joan's. It was a simple act, but it ranged him definitely on her side.

"Carter's phoning your father. He should have let you do it. Makes an awkward situation. We don't have situations like this often, so it's hardly surprising he didn't know what to do."

Joan flushed. "I believe my father has been called," she said coolly.

Bassford's eyes narrowed. He looked at her again in cold appraisal. "Who is the dead man, Miss Acheson?"

"I don't know, Mr. Bassford." Joan drew a deep breath, and tried to be as calmly composed as she could. "All I know about it is this: I came here last night because I was later than I thought

and I didn't like driving on to Richmond after dark when the road is mostly detour. I stopped here, and asked them to call me at five. I was leaving, when the colored boy went back to my cabin to see if I'd left anything and found—"

"Found you had," said Bassford dryly.

Joan recovered quickly. "Apparently. I've never seen the man before. I don't know how he got there."

Bassford still stared coldly at her. "I can tell you how he got there," he said. "He was stabbed in the back and shoved under the bed, quite dead, at least five hours ago. You were in there from half-past nine last night till five this morning. The surgeon says he's been in there since approximately one o'clock."

He regarded her steadily.

"My advice to you, Miss Acheson, is to come forward with a straight story. It'll be easier for you—and your family—in the long run. You can't hope to hush this up. You can depend on me to do all I can to make it easy for you. I think your father will tell you I'm a square shooter. Who is the man, Miss Acheson?"

"I don't know, Mr. Bassford."

Bassford's lips tightened. "Listen, Miss Acheson," he drawled. "The facts are perfectly clear here, and incontrovertible. You seem to have a mistaken idea about—the powers of the courts."

Joan flushed again. "If you mean my father, Mr. Bassford, you're wrong. I'm telling you the absolute truth. If that man was in the cabin when I left it this morning, I didn't see him," she said. "He wasn't there lost night, because—well, I looked under the bed before I got in it."

Dr. Harp nodded. "I doubt if you could convince a jury otherwise," he said.

Bassford coughed. "Suppose you let me take care of that end of it, Professor," he said. He nodded to his stenographer. "Tell us your version, Miss Acheson."

So Joan repeated the story that nobody believed; about going out to the car to get her bag, coming back, going to sleep with most of her clothes on, and waking up when her flashlight fell. At that point she stopped suddenly. "I turned on the light and picked it up. And if anybody had been under the bed, I'd have seen him.'

"You certainly should have," Bassford's voice was heavy with irony.

"*But I didn't!*" Joan snapped.

Jeff Dixon, standing fifty feet off, suddenly kicked a small stone out of his path with quite useless violence.

Carter looked at him and then grinned suddenly. "Pretty, isn't she?" he said.

"Is she?" Jeff's manner clearly

indicated surprise and indifference. "I don't care if she's pretty or not. I don't like the way they're hounding her."

"Nuts! She got in it herself, didn't she?" Carter moved closer and lowered his voice. "Let Milt handle it," he said. "This is a break for him, and he's good. This is the biggest thing he's had since the Farmers' Bank robbery in Roanoke. And did he get them! The whole caboodle except the president."

Jeff nodded. "You're telling me," he said bitterly. "He got everything except the president and a hundred and ten thousand dollars of the depositors' money —and nine thousand of it belonged to us. Anyway, what gripes me is, what if that kid really didn't kill him, after all?"

"Listen. If she didn't do it and old Milt can prove she didn't, that'll be the best thing he's ever pulled for himself. 'Commonwealth Attorney Proves Old Enemy's Daughter Innocent of Murder Charge.' "

Jeff looked back at the girl still at the table with the commonwealth attorney, and shook his head. He looked back at the car corral, where two plain-clothes men were working through the parked cars.

"The weapon?" he said.

Carter nodded. "That—and anything else. They didn't find anything in his pockets but a watch and a big bulge where his wallet had been. I guess they figure it's around somewhere. Look! Bassford's giving you the high sign."

Jeff crossed the grass to the little group under a sycamore tree. Joan Acheson apparently did not even see him.

The commonwealth attorney indicated a chair. "Sit down, Dixon. You've changed the name of this place since I was here last. You called it the Haunted Bridge Camp, three years ago.

Jeff nodded. "We changed it —for two reasons. The name scared people. They used to leave the lights burning all night. And second, you gave us so darn much publicity catching the last of that Roanoke bank gang in the end cabin there that we couldn't handle the crowds."

His lips tightened perceptibly.

Bassford smiled dryly. "Sorry if that hurt you," he said. "How many people are here now?"

"Thirteen, altogether. Dr. Harp stays in the house. He's practically one of the family."

The chubby little man blinked behind his gold spectacles. "I come every vacation," he explained. "I study geologic formations."

He cleared his throat, glanced sideways at Jeff, and reddened. Jeff grinned. His mother could hardly be regarded as a geologic formation. One or twice he had come on them, Dr. Harp looking wistful and a little hurt and his

mother shaking her head very kindly.

The commonwealth attorney asked, "The dead man was not one of the thirteen?"

"No. I've got a list of the people who came in, from noon yesterday, or were here already." Jeff handed Bassford a typed sheet:

Mr. and Mrs. Howard Baylor, Harold Baylor, New York City.

Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Lyons, Baltimore, Md.

Miss Ella Green, Miss Lucy Cowie, Miss Viola Sayre, Detroit, Mich.

Mr. and Mrs. James Perkins, San Francisco, Calif.

"And a man and woman named Smith, with a New Jersey license, who didn't give their address. And Miss Acheson."

"Who didn't give her name?"

"I didn't ask for it."

"You do ordinarily ask people's names?"

"Not when they take the cabins. We do if they're in the house. I happen to know the Lyonses, by the way. They've stopped here two or three times a year for some time, on their way to Florida and back."

Bassford nodded. He jerked his head at one of his men standing by him. "Get 'em all over," he said.

He settled back on the rear legs of his chair and regarded Joan through narrowed, calculating lids.

It was a great relief when Bassford turned his head towards Dr. Harp. The little man was staring down at his notes on the envelope on the table in front of him with an expression of delight.

"Eureka!" Dr. Harp cried. He waved the envelope in the air.

Bassford stared at him. "*Eureka* what?"

"Eureka," Dr. Harp said calmly simply means that I've found it. In other words, the scientific method has been entirely vindicated. I was discussing it with Miss Acheson prior to your arrival. You see, the scientific method is quite infallible."

Bassford stared again, and smiled very dryly. "I suppose you mean she didn't kill the man?" he drawled.

Dr. Harp nodded. "Precisely so," he said.

Joan Acheson stared at him, hardly daring to believe, really, that the absurd, kindly little man could have figured something out that would make them all see how ridiculous it was. She glanced anxiously at Bassford. He was nodding an ironic thanks to Dr. Harp, with an amused contempt that was hardly concealed.

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind explaining, Professor, how the man's body got in the cabin —if Miss Acheson did not see

it there. When she slept in the cabin and has been sitting out here ever since she left it. And when you can't get a body in there except through the front door."

"That," said Dr. Harp, "is elementary."

He got to his feet, patted Joan reassuringly on the shoulder, and bowed to the commonwealth attorney.

"If you'll excuse me," he said, "I shall verify my conclusion by a simple observation. The application of the scientific method to the problem—assuming, of course, that Miss Acheson did not kill the man—shows plainly that there is only one possible way in which the body could have been introduced—under all the circumstances—into the cabin. I shall make sure that that is so."

Bassford raised his hand. Dr. Harp turned back to the table.

"Just a minute, Professor," Bassford said. "Just as a matter of routine, you didn't happen to recognize the body yourself, did you?"

Dr. Harp blinked like an owl whose sense of honor had been seriously impugned.

"Certainly not," he said. "Furthermore, I should like to give you my itinerary of yesterday afternoon and evening. I investigated the cavern at the end of the cow pasture after my afternoon nap until five o'clock. I returned, and helped Mrs. Dixon in the flower garden until dinner. I dined, and accompanied Mrs. Dixon to prayer meeting, and returned at nine o'clock. I then went to my room and read until half past ten, when I retired."

"You weren't out of your room between nine last night and this morning?"

"No, sir," Dr. Harp bowed again. "With your permission—"

"Sure, go ahead." Mr. Bassford grinned a little, looked at Joan, and shook his head.

Dr. Harp stumped off across the grass. Then he stopped, turned suddenly, and came back.

"Mr. Commonwealth Attorney," he said, "I wish to amend my last statement. As a matter of fact I *did* leave my room, at about quarter to ten."

The commonwealth attorney looked up, surprised and alert.

"I went across the hall to get a glass of water—begging your pardon, Miss Acheson—for my plates. I have, as you see, artificial teeth. I thought I should tell you. As I frequently explain to my students, the scientific approach is useless unless one has all the data."

Mr. Bassford then nodded. "Thanks, Professor. That sure takes a load off my mind."

Dr. Harp beamed again and stumped off toward the cabins.

The commonwealth attorney shook his head. "That man's cuckoo," he said to Joan. "Gosh! He's coming back."

Dr. Harp had turned a second time, and was trudging back towards them. As he came up he drew his chair over by Joan and sat down very soberly.

"It occurs to me, my dear," he said calmly, "that possibly I could be of more service to you right here. I shouldn't want them to—to put anything over on you in the absence of counsel, as it were. If that's satisfactory to Mr. Bassford."

"Sure," the commonwealth attorney drawled amiably. "But what about the scientific method?"

"That," said Dr. Harp gently, "will keep. Not being dependent upon time or personality for its effect."

Bassford grinned. Joan then glanced anxiously at the little man. It was obvious that something else had occurred to him.

Mr. Bassford's eyes ran blandly around the little circle of faces in front of him.

"I'm sorry about this, folks," he said. "I want you to be on your way as soon as possible, but I've got to keep you a while. A man was murdered here last night, in this young lady's cabin. It looks pretty bad, on the face of it, but it's an axiom of the law that a person is innocent until he's proved guilty. Now I'm going to ask you folks to see if any of you can identify the body over there. I'm going to tell you that so far we have not found the weapon that killed him. My men are going through the baggage of every person here."

Mr. Howard Baylor spoke up in the murmur of protest that went around: "You're not going to ask these ladies to identify the body?"

"I'm afraid so, Mr. Baylor."

Baylor flushed hotly.

Bassford shook his head. "I'm certainly sorry about it, sir," he said suavely. "But as this young lady is suspected of the murder I could hardly excuse any of the older women here, much as I should like to."

IV

Joan Acheson sat listening to them. Two quite inconsistent thoughts kept persistently shoving themselves up in her consciousness. The first was that it was all preposterously theatrical, utterly and completely impossible and unreal. The second was that, granted somehow that it really was real, it was all so perfectly American.

They were so perfectly a cross section of all the country. Mr. Howard Baylor, prosperous, aggressive, slightly pompous, perfectly confident of himself, and not too intelligent. Mrs. Baylor, obviously pulled up by the bootstraps, and a snob—in contrast to Mrs. Dixon, who was "reduced," but a lady to her fingertips and always would be, no matter

where she was or how poor she was.

Hal Baylor, always expensively-groomed, cynical, bored, a little amused in a veiled, faintly contemptuous way by all of them, including his parents. The young couple named Smith, the man pale and quiet and quite overborne by the dark-haired, deep-bosomed girl with him, wearing a shiny new wedding ring and much too much lipstick and both of them obviously frightened.

The three women standing next to Mrs. Smith were certainly vacationing schoolteachers if Joan had ever seen one. Miss Cowie was plump, bright-eyed, and coy; Miss Sayre was thin and tight-lipped; and Miss Ella Green was large, slow, and patient.

There were two other couples, and they would be the Lyonses and Perkinses, of Baltimore and San Francisco, respectively. The Lyonses were completely at ease and at home. Mrs. Lyons was very quiet, but gave the impression that she was not missing any tricks. Her husband was lean and dark, with dark hair and graying temples, a hard mouth, hard eyes.

And then there were the Perkinses. Joan could see that they did not think much of Mr. Lyons. Mr. Perkins was a big, simple man with horn-rimmed glasses and an honest face, and he stood beside the round little woman, also with horn-rimmed glasses, with a protective bulldog air.

Twelve of them. And Joan Acheson was the thirteenth. And one of them had, somehow, in some way, got a man into her cabin and killed him there.

The Commonwealth attorney was going up towards her cabin and everybody was following him. Dr. Harp touched her arm, and she went on.

She stopped on the narrow path edged with whitewashed bricks and bordered with spice pinks. Bassford was at the door of the cabin. The people were approaching one by one as Carter told them off.

"You stay here, my dear," Dr. Harp whispered.

The next instant she saw him standing alongside the commonwealth attorney quite as if he were a special deputy, and she was by the door of the cabin next to hers, alone. It was odd, the way they all kept away from her—all except one of the commonwealth attorney's men, who did not get more than ten feet from her at any time.

She sat down on the white doorstep of "Iowa" to wait, and looked up quickly, vaguely aware that someone was looking at her. It was Harold Baylor, and when he caught her eye he moved easily away from his mother and sat down beside her.

"Neat mess," he said pleas-

antly. "How'd you get mixed up in it?"

"I'm not sure yet," Joan said.

"Serves us right, I guess—stopping at a dump like this."

Joan shook her head. "You oughtn't to be talking to me. Mr. Bassford will think we're accomplices."

Hal Baylor grinned. "That's okay by me, lady," he said. "Who's your friend?"

"Who?"

"The thunder-cloud guy." He nodded towards Jeff Dixon.

"He's no friend of mine," Joan said hotly. "He thinks I killed that man."

Baylor yawned. "Probably did it himself."

A sharp voice rose: *"Harold!"* Mrs. Baylor was staring at them.

"I guess it's my turn to take a peek," Harold said. "I'll be seeing you."

He sauntered off, and Joan saw him go into the cabin, and come out.

Dr. Harp came hurrying towards her. "It's your turn, my dear."

Inside the cabin Bassford was sitting on a chair by the bed, his face almost even with hers as she looked in. He raised the chintz spread and the sheets without taking his eyes off hers.

Joan shook her head slowly. Then she looked again, and felt the blood drain out of her face with a sudden, sickening rush.

"So you do recognize him, Miss Acheson," Bassford's voice was as silky as the slither of a snake through the dried corn.

"I—yes, I do. He was—"

There was a sudden loud shout from outside: *"Hey, Chief!"*

Joan looked through the open door in time to see one of the men who had been searching the cars slam the door of her coupe and come running towards them holding a small object in his hand.

"It's his wallet, Chief. It was stuck up on the sun shield over the wheel." He handed over a black leather billfold.

Bassford opened the billfold, looking steadily at Joan. He took out a motor registration card of the District of Columbia issued to Ernest L. Rose, 1868 K Street N.W., a driver's license in the same name, and four fifty-dollar bills. His face was a cynical mask. Joan gazed at him with dawning horror.

"Who is this fellow, Miss Acheson?" he asked softly. His hand waved at the inert mass under the sheet.

"I—I don't know," Joan whispered. "I saw him yesterday at a hot dog stand where I stopped. He was getting gas. I didn't recognize him before."

Bassford looked steadily at her. It looked cut and dried. But he was not a fool. It looked almost a little too much cut and dried. "If this was my own daughter," he was thinking, "I

might think there was something cockeyed." Furthermore, it wouldn't do to make a mistake.

Then the commonwealth attorney shoook his head impatiently. "Find that weapon, Carter," he said through shut teeth.

He stared coldly at Joan. "What did you kill him for, Miss Acheson? A girl in your position doesn't need two hundred dollars. What did you do it with?"

Joan shook her head dumbly. "I—I didn't—"

"Did he come into your cabin?"

Dr. Harp leaned forward. "That's self-defense, my dear," he whispered.

Joan shook her head.

Bassford looked at the little man with a sardonic flicker in his eyes. "Thought you had it all figured out, Professor."

Dr. Harp hesitated. "So I have," he said slowly. "*If* she didn't do it. It's entirely dependent on the truth of the premise. The scientific method merely explains how the body got into the cabin, granting Miss Acheson's innocence."

Bassford turned as Carter stuck his head in the door.

"Say, Chief, the lady in the big car says they're leaving. How about it?"

"Oh, well! Let 'em go."

"Just a moment!" said Dr. Harp earnestly. "Just a moment! *If* my conclusion is correct, they really shouldn't be allowed to go, Mr. Attorney!"

Bassford looked at him curiously. "You still think she didn't do it?"

"I do," said Dr. Harp. "In fact I *know* that the presence of the body here does not necessitate that conclusion."

The commonwealth attorney wiped his forehead. "Spring it, Professor," he said softly.

Dr. Harp paused to collect his thoughts. "It's perfectly simple, if you follow the scientific method," he said. "One of three things has *got* to be true. It's the simplest logic. One: Miss Acheson killed this man in the cabin—I hope you'll pardon me, my dear—or outside and dragged him in. It's immaterial. Or, Two: He isn't dead in the cabin. Of course, that really won't wash. Or, Three: He *is* dead in the cabin—*but Miss Acheson did not stay in the cabin.*"

"Which she did," said Bassford blandly.

"No!" said Dr, Harp. "That's just the point. *She didn't!*"

The commonwealth attorney groaned. "Good heavens, man! She says herself she stayed in the cabin!"

Dr. Harp nodded very placidly. "I know," he said. "I know. *But she must be wrong.* She *must,* logically!" He hurried on as Bassford—and Joan—stared at him. "What I mean is this—that if she stayed there, she *must* have

killed him. But if she didn't kill him, then she couldn't *possibly* have stayed there. Don't you see?"

The commonwealth attorney nodded with heavy irony. "I see," he said. "The answer is that she killed him."

"You don't see," Dr. Harp said calmly. "But I'll show you."

He turned to Joan, who felt very much like a bone between two dogs.

"My dear," he said gently, "you left your cabin last night, after you'd got settled in it."

Joan nodded. It seemed to her that if in all her life she had utterly not understood anything, this was the time.

"Precisely," said Dr. Harp. "This is essential to the theory. Now, my dear, please attend most carefully, because it's very important to you. Did you, or did you not, leave your door open when you went out?"

"I always close doors quietly," Joan said. "It's the only thing they ever really taught me."

"Precisely," Dr. Harp said. "However, I trust they taught you one other thing. Now, my dear. When you came back, *you came to the wrong cabin.*"

He looked expectantly at Joan, and as she nodded dumbly he looked triumphantly at the commonwealth attorney.

"Yes," Joan said. "I did. But I don't know how you know it."

Bassford stared at the little man. "I don't know what difference it makes, Professor," he drawled, "but just how *did* you know it?"

Dr. Harp chuckled. "I didn't *know* it," he said. "I assumed it. It was demanded by the scientific method, and the scientific method is infallible. So it *had* to be. We will show you what difference it makes. My dear, just tell the commonwealth attorney how you knew you were in the wrong cabin."

It was Joan's turn to stare. "Because it was empty," she said.

Dr. Harp nodded. "The things you had left in it— I mean if it had been your cabin—were not there?"

"Yes."

"Precisely. And then you went outside."

He nodded encouragingly to Joan to go on, and looked to see if the commonwealth attorney was following.

"I went outside and saw I'd got into 'New York' instead of 'Florida'. They all looked exactly alike."

"Precisely. And therefore, my dear, you immediately went on to the right, to your own cabin. To 'Florida.' "

Joan nodded.

"Where the body of Ernest L. Rose was found the next morning," said Mr. Bassford silkily.

Dr. Harp chuckled again.

"That," he said," if you will pardon a vulgar expression, is what *you* think. Now my dear. The probability is that I can tell you one more thing you did last night, *if* you were taught in your youth to keep your eyes open as well as to close doors quietly."

He paused a moment, then continued very deliberately: "When you got to your cabin, you found of course that your things were there. *But they were not the way you had left them!*"

He looked expectantly at Joan again, and he chuckled a third time.

"Why, yes!" Joan said. "My bag was at the head of the bed instead of the foot, and my hat was all smoothed out, and I—"

"And you don't smooth hats out," said Dr. Harp, nodding. "Well, it's all very clear, then. Come outside, Mr. Commonwealth Attorney. I shall demonstrate."

Dr. Harp led the way to the neatly bordered path, followed by Joan and Mr. Bassford, turned about, and looked up at the three rose-covered cabins in front of him: "New York" to the left, then "Florida," and "Iowa" to the right.

"Now, then," said Dr. Harp. He stumped briskly to the cabin to the right, reached up on tiptoe, and with a pair of chubby hands unhooked the little green sign on which "Iowa" was printed in neat white letters. He then stumped briskly down the path to the left, unhooked the "New York" sign and put "Iowa" there. Then he came back directly in front of them, substituted "New York for the "Florida" on the cabin in which the dead man's body lay, and put the "Florida" sign on the cabin to the right. He then came beaming back, turned and surveyed the three cabins. They were now "Iowa," "New York," and "Florida."

"You see," he said. "It was all quite simple to the scientific mind and once the scientific method was applied—and realizing that this child couldn't possibly have killed anybody. It was purely a matter of—ah—ratiocination. When Miss Acheson admitted returning to the wrong cabin, it was elementary. And this is what happened.

"She did not return to the wrong cabin. Her sense of direction was perfectly adequate. But in her absence the name of the cabin had been changed, as I have indicated, and her things removed. The cabins are practically identical, inside as well as out, so the subterfuge went unnoticed."

Joan and the commonwealth attorney spoke at the same moment: "But why—?"

"For the simple and nefarious purpose," Dr. Harp interrupted, "of making it appear that you, my dear, had murdered the man

ostensibly under your bed—the late Mr. Rose. And that it was definitely plotted to that end is of course further shown by the fact that the bed was mussed as if you had slept in it, and the man's wallet was in your car." He rubbed his hands and looked around, his face shining with triumph.

"But why *me?*" said Joan.

Dr. Harp blinked, and turned a troubled face to her. "Why?" He repeated. "My dear, I shouldn't know *why*. That is the commonwealth attorney's field, not mine!"

He turned to Bassford. The commonwealth attorney was staring at the changed signs and nodding his head slowly.

"I get you, Professor," he said. "Your idea is that Miss Acheson, after going to what she thought was the wrong cabin, then went on to the right and spent the night in the cabin labeled 'Florida,' which really was 'Iowa.' So she never was in the cabin with the body."

Dr. Harp looked a little surprised, as if so obvious a thing really ought not to have to be put into words. "Oh, certainly," he said. "The signs, of course, were changed back after she'd got in. She might have noticed, as she came out in the morning. However, as you see, she didn't."

Bassford strode abruptly to the cabin to the right, which was labeled "Florida" now that Dr. Harp had changed the signs, and opened the door. Joan and Dr. Harp, following, peered in under his arms. And Joan gave a little gasp.

"What is it, my dear?" said Dr. Harp.

"That's my hairbrush on the dresser!" she said. "I always leave something!"

The commonwealth attorney strode into the cabin and picked it up. On the silver back was engraved in neat letters, *Joan Mason Acheson.* He stared down at it. Hanging from its stiff white bristles were a dozen short, curly golden hairs.

Bassford nodded curtly. "I guess the scientific method wins, Professor," he said. He went to the door. "Carter! Tell the Baylors they'll stay here till I tell 'em to go—and they'll *like* it!"

V

As far as Joan could see, the only people who still regarded her with suspicion were the three schoolteachers. Mrs. Baylor, in particular, was most cordial.

Mr. Bassford also was most cordial, and when Dr. Harp busied himself in a continued application of the scientific method, Joan was privileged to be present when the professor made a formal, logical statement of the issues yet to be developed.

With the definite abandonment of the easy and obvious solution

that Joan had murdered the man whose body was in the cabin where she should have slept, and the continued failure to find the weapon with which the murder was committed, Dr. Harp's investigation, was as he complained, painfully shy of premises. Shorn of his Roman numerals and Arabic numeral sub-divisions, the items he jotted down on the back of a second envelope even more creased and soiled than the first were as follows:

Why was the young lady framed?

Why did the Baylors stop here?

Why are the Smiths so upset?

Is there any connection between the dead man and Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Lyons, of Baltimore, who stop here two or three days on their way to and from Florida every year—and have already been here twice this year?

And when the unexpected information came out in the general meeting later, presided over by the commonwealth attorney, that the little round woman in horn-rimmed glasses, Mrs. Perkins, whose husband was a retired mail carrier with a pension of $102 a month and two married sons, had seen the dead man at the dog races in Hialeah distributing betting forecasts—Mr. Perkins having decided that it was better to admit they had seen the man before than to conceal information from the law—and further that she had frequently seen Harold Baylor there, Joan watched Dr. Harp's pen scribble:

Why does Baylor's mother look frightened?

Why does Baylor Senior ditto?

But when the greatest surprise of the morning came Dr. Harp wrote nothing at all. He simply sat looking perplexed.

The first definite information connecting the dead man with the Shady Bridge Tourist Camp came when Mrs. Dixon whispered to her son. Then she caught the commonwealth attorney's eyes.

"Was the man's name Ernest Rose?"

"Yes, ma'am." Bassford shot her a surprised and questioning glance.

"Then he is probably the man who came here in December and wanted to see the place. I—I didn't connect him before. He said he was thinking of buying a place here, and I told him to come back some time." She turned to Jeff, who was looking at her strangely. "I didn't tell you, Jeff. You see, I thought I might sell the place, so you could get into some kind of business and not be so tied down."

She looked away quickly. Jeff's face flushed darkly.

"Did you see him again, ma'am?" Bassford said quickly.

Mrs. Dixon shook her head. "But I got a letter from him last

week from Palm Beach saying he would be up the last of the month to talk business."

"You did?" said Bassford. "Where's the letter? Have you still got it?"

Mrs. Dixon nodded. "Run and get it, dear. It's in my secretary, in the upper left-hand drawer."

Joan watched the swift, clean stride that took Jeff Dixon out of sight behind the high myrtle hedge, and looked back, catching Harold Baylor's eyes. He seemed rather more amused than alarmed at Mrs. Perkins' having seen him at the race track, but Joan thought there was a first little flicker of alarm in his eyes.

"I tried to sell the place after my husband died," Mrs. Dixon said. "It was so much to keep up and pay taxes on. No one wanted it then. And here within a week two people turn up, both wanting to buy it."

Dr. Harp was looking at her very intently.

"This man Rose, and who else?" Bassford asked.

"A Mr. Henson from Richmond. He's coming down again tomorrow."

Bassford nodded to his stenographer, who made a note.

"How much were they offering?"

"Mr. Rose said five thousand dollars. Mr. Henson four thousand, five hundred, in cash. There are over two hundred acres left, but the land isn't good and the house needs a lot of repairs."

Jeff Dixon came quickly through the myrtle hedge.

"You must have put it somewhere else, Mother," he said. "It's not in your desk."

Mrs. Dixon was puzzled. "Are you sure?"

"I've been all through it."

Mrs. Dixon got up. "I'm sure it's there," she said.

But when she came back she was more puzzled than before. "I know I put it there, because I was going to show it to Mr. Henson when he came tomorrow. I put it away very carefully."

Joan looked, puzzled, from one face to another. Most faces were as puzzled as her own, but the commonwealth attorney's was serious and intent. So was Dr. Harp's.

Bassford looked around the circle, his mouth tightened and sardonic. "All right," he said. "Which one of you got away with that letter? Hand it over!"

No one moved. He turned to Mrs. Dixon. "When did you put it there?"

"Last week. But—I saw it there yesterday afternoon."

"How many of these people were in that room since then?"

Mrs. Dixon hesitated.

"There's been a murder here, ma'am," Bassford said. "Nobody who'd kill that fellow would stop at stealing a letter."

"The desk is in the back parlor," Mrs. Dixon said hesi-

tantly. "My son and I have been in there, and the house servants, Julius and the cook, Charity. Then in the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Lyons came, and the Baylors."

She made a simple gesture of apology as she mentioned the names, as if wanting them to know that she would rather not have had to do so.

"In fact, everybody here was in the house except Miss Acheson. You see, we serve dinner in the dining-room, and breakfast, unless people want it outside. Most people don't. But, of course, my desk isn't in the dining-room, and Mr. and Mrs. Perkins and Mr. and Mrs. Smith I'm sure didn't go in the parlors at all."

"The rest of 'em did?"

"Well, yes. You see, many people have the idea that if you take in tourists it's quite all right for them to inspect everything. Of course, we're pleased when they like our things."

"Did you see any of 'em near the desk?"

Mrs. Dixon flushed a little. "Mrs. Baylor and the three ladies." She smiled at the schoolteachers. "Mrs. Baylor was kind enough to offer me fifty dollars for the desk, which I've refused seven hundred for."

Mrs. Dixon smiled again faintly. "It's hard to get people to understand that you don't want to sell your old things. You did open the drawer, didn't you, Mrs. Baylor?"

Mrs. Baylor was annoyed. "Just to see if there was a secret panel," she said tartly.

"Of course. I quite understood that."

Mr. Bassford did not. "Did you see the letter, Mrs. Baylor?" he asked blandly.

"There were papers in there. I didn't look at them."

Bassford nodded. "And how about you, ladies?"

The Misses Green, Cowie and Sayre denied doing more than poke about.

"As a matter of fact," Mr. Lyons said, "Mrs. Dixon mentioned to me that she was thinking about selling the place, if she could get a fair price."

Joan turned to look at him, lean and dark under his heavy coat of Florida tan.

Dr. Harp was scribbling again on his envelope. Joan read:

Why in Heaven's name should Mr. Rose wish to buy this place?

Why should Mr. Henson?

Why should anyone steal Mr. Rose's letter?

"Mr. and Mrs. Lyons have been stopping here three and four times a year for the past three years," Mrs. Dixon was saying. "We think of them as old friends. I hadn't mentioned selling the place to anybody but Dr. Harp"—Mrs. Dixon colored faintly—"and when Mr. Lyons said something about coming

down in July I told him I was thinking of selling."

Joan looked around again. It was all too puzzling for her, but she could see from the face of the commonwealth attorney that it meant something.

Bassford nodded slowly. "I'll have to ask you people to stay on the place," he said shortly. He turned to Mrs. Dixon. "I'll have a look inside, ma'am."

Joan looked at Jeff Dixon. He was watching the rest of them move off. Just as his eyes met hers and brightened, Harold Baylor touched her elbow.

"How about having a look at the natural wonders the professor tells about?" He pointed to the sloping pasture behind the field of young corn. "We've got lots of time on our hands."

Joan looked back at Jeff. But he had turned and was following his mother and the commonwealth attorney towards the house. She smiled brightly at Hal Baylor. "I'd like to. When do we start?"

It was after lunch when they started. It was too late to go before, in the first place, and, in the second, Dr. Harp, commandeered by Mrs. Baylor, had agreed to give, and did give, an impromptu lecture on the stalactites and stalagmites that had been forming through thousands of years in the small cavern above the cow pasture.

"I shall be happy to conduct a party up there later," Dr. Harp said, "because, in my opinion, while there is nothing in the Dixon cavern to compare with the great caverns across the ridge, it is most interesting geologically. You see, the Dixon's place was regarded for many years as haunted, because of the tiny wraith that floated over the hill above the pasture. Actually, the wraith was caused by the cold air coming from the sinkhole. Few colored persons would think of venturing near the cavern, and no native whites are interested, except children. That is why I find this spot of unusual interest

VI

Joan and Harold Baylor wandered away and watched the tadpoles swimming in the pool under the bridge. Mrs. Baylor watched them out of the corner of her eye.

At lunch, Joan and Hal Baylor ate at a small table under the mimosa tree. That is how they saw Milton Bassford leave. It is also one reason why they did not see that the newspaper-wrapped parcel under his arm contained a bayonet that Jeff Dixon's grandfather had carried at First and Second Manassas, and a long, thin-bladed knife that had shaved slices of old country ham in the Dixon kitchen for two generations.

Neither did they know that a

crumpled, half-charred letterhead of a Miami hotel had been retrieved from under the garbage box at the gate of the car corral and was carefully tucked away in the commonwealth attorney's coat pocket.

Joan watched him go with a sharp pang of apprehension.

"What's the matter?" Hal Baylor was watching her.

Joan shrugged. "I don't know. I'm just afraid, somehow. It seems so ghastly, knowing there's somebody here who could do anything like that. It seemed a little—safer, when he was here."

Baylor grinned. "You didn't think so when he was busy pinning it on you."

Joan's slim body quivered involuntarily. All that seemed pretty remote and unreal.

"Who do you think did it?" she whispered.

Hal Baylor shrugged his immaculately tailored white-linen shoulders and yawned. "Your guess is as good as mine. And listen—I don't care. We could stay here the rest of the year and it'd be okay with me. As long as you were here."

"Thanks," Joan said coolly. "It doesn't make any difference to you that somebody's going to be hanged in a month or so?"

"Oh, rot! That bird won't find anything he doesn't know already. He'll end by pinning it on the colored boy. That's what they always do down here."

The words were hardly out of Baylor's mouth when he felt a stinging slap on the side of his face. He stared stupidly at the girl standing up beside him.

"Don't you dare say such a thing!" Joan cried hotly.

"Why, you little spitfire!" Hal Baylor sprang to his feet, his dark eyes smoldering. For an instant they glared at each other. Then he laughed suddenly. "Sorry — I apologize! I forgot you're a native, too. Darn it, I forgot your father's a judge. Don't go! You and I are the only civilized people around here."

"Then no more cracks about natives," said Joan, the quick, green anger slowly dying in the cool gray of her eyes.

"I promise."

The smile in Baylor's eyes was all surface, but Joan was too angry to see that.

"Your mother's probably looking for you, anyway," she added curtly.

Baylor grinned. "That makes us even. Sit down—or let's hunt the wraith and the natural wonders before the rest of them."

Joan hesitated. Baylor tucked her arm in his. "Oh, come on," he urged.

She started to take her arm away, when she saw Jeff Dixon coming from the house and saw that he was watching them. When they got beyond the row of cabins she drew her arm away. They walked up the narrow cart

trail winding between the limestone boulders beyond the corn patch. A hundred feet above them was the cow pasture fence and a grove of hickory trees.

Standing nonchalantly in front of the gate, his elbows on the top rail and one foot resting on the lowest, was Jeff Dixon. Joan looked at him as they came up, and glanced back at the house. He must have run through the field to get there so quickly.

Baylor stared offensively. "Well, well," he said. "Fancy meeting the farmer boy here, of all places."

The quick anger flared in Joan's eyes. Jeff smiled cheerfully. Furthermore, he made no move to get out of their way. Joan's anger shifted instantly. On the whole, she decided young Mr. Dixon was being by far the more offensive of the two.

"Will you open the gate, or will you get away so we can do it?" she demanded.

Jeff Dixon grinned, and extracted a cigarette from his shirt pocket. He put the cigarette between his lips.

"What's the idea, farmer boy?" Baylor took a step forward.

"The idea, friends," Jeff said calmly, "is that the little lady with the yellow locks is staying with the folks."

"Yes? You've got your wires crossed. Miss Acheson is going for a walk with me—through that gate."

Jeff shook his head. "Oh, no. She's going back to the house and stay there until her father comes to take care of her."

Joan's eyes went a bright green. "Don't be a *complete* fool!" she snapped.

Jeff looked at her. "I'd rather be a fool than have another corpse to plow under," he said calmly. "You see, young lady—or you would see if you had anything under the yellow topknot—there's been a murder in these parts. If you're the chap that did it, then our city friend isn't safe with you. And, if you didn't do it, why then, my child, you aren't safe with—anybody."

"Are you implying that I—?"

Jeff cut Baylor short with a bland wave of the hand. "I imply nothing. I'm telling you, in words of one syllable, city guy—if you don't already know it—that somebody around here tried to pin a major crime right on Miss Acheson's left cheek—and he must have had a reason for doing it. Now, it may have been you. I don't know. But I know that whoever it was isn't going to get another crack at the young lady. Not while she's on our hands. It gives the camp a bad name. So trot back, children."

He regarded them with maddening complacency, and Joan's eyes snapped.

Hal Baylor took a step for-

ward. He was an inch or so shorter than Jeff, but heavily built.

"Look here, Dixon," Baylor said curtly. "Miss Acheson and I are going up the hill. And we're going through that gate."

Jeff shook his head. "*You* can go through the gate, Baylor, or you can go under it, or any way you want to. Miss Acheson is going back to the house—if the farmer boy has to carry her."

He nodded. "Understand?"

Joan could not remember ever having been so angry. She walked up to him, her voice as silky as a water moccasin gliding over lily pads, her eyes sharp emerald needles.

"Will you get out of the way and mind your own business?"

"That's exactly what I'm doing, little one." He looked down at her with infuriating calm. "You see, it doesn't make any difference to *me* whether anything happens to you. But, as long as you're here, you're doing as you're told. Now, scoot back to the house before I pack you back."

"Don't you dare speak to me that way!" Joan cried. She stamped her foot. "We're going up there and you can't stop us!"

He grinned again. "I'll give you a swell imitation."

Joan stood there helpless. Hal Baylor stepped forward. "One side, farmer," he said easily. One hand shoved Jeff Dixon off, the other reached for the wooden bolt on the gate.

Then Joan caught her breath. Jeff took one step towards him. Baylor swung round and brought up his hands. Jeff's left shoulder swung in, and in front of it a trained, flashing left, hard on the mark. Hal Baylor's head jerked violently back; he staggered away from the gate, lost his balance and sat down abruptly.

"Oh!" Joan said.

She stood breathless, looking down at him. Baylor got up slowly, breathing heavily, killing rage in his dark eyes, and lost his head. He rushed wildly, arms swinging, at the cool, lean figure by the gate. Joan saw the flashing left again, almost quicker than her eye could follow, and heard the sharp *smack!* as Baylor slumped to the ground. He lay quite still.

Joan took a quick step towards him, then whirled around. "You bully!" she cried.

Then a strong pair of arms went round her waist and lifted her off the ground, and, before she quite realized what was happening, Joan Acheson, kicking and hitting out, was being carried like a sack of meal down the crooked trail. Then suddenly Jeff put her down. He grinned cheerfully at her and picked up her hat.

"There, now. Run along and comb your hair."

"I won't!" Joan cried passionately.

"All right. I'll carry you the rest of the way, then. You see I'm not going to have you hurt." Jeff's voice was suddenly deeply earnest. "I don't think I'd like to have you hurt. And there's a murderer around here, beautiful."

He took a step towards her. But Joan dodged, and ran like a gold-tipped streak of lightning down the trail.

Jeff stood for an instant looking after her. Then he turned and looked up the trail to the fence. Hal Baylor was getting unsteadily to his feet. Jeff watched him for a moment, and went on down the trail.

The Commonwealth Attorney for Bedford County patted his moist forehead and ran two fingers around the inside of his wilted collar. It was hot and damp, and long after his supper hour, and the information neatly tabulated in the sheaf of papers in front of him seemed to him to make the wood of mystery that surrounded the Shady Bridge Tourist Camp shadier than ever. He went through the sheaf a final time to ponder once more over the information that his office had been able so far to collect about the thirteen people concerned in the murder.

Mr. Bassford now knew the reason—or one reason—for the Baylor's staying at a tourist camp instead of a Richmond hotel. It was not because of Mrs. Baylor's interest in antiques.

He knew that the murdered man, Rose, had served two short sentences for high-class confidence games, one in Baltimore and one in Chicago, and that between sentences he had lived alternately at the best hotels in Atlantic City, Palm Beach, and Miami and in the dives that cluster round racing centers. His car, a Chevrolet sedan, had been found half a mile below the Shady Bridge Tourist Camp a little off the road. The dead man's baggage consisted of half a dozen new shirts, a tan worsted summer suit, and a pack of stationery from seven of the leading hotels on the Eastern seaboard.

The proprietor of the service station and hot-dog stand where Joan Acheson had seen the man had given the information that his wallet had contained, the day of his death, a thick bundle of hundred-dollar notes clipped together. He had shown them accidentally when paying for gas, and when the proprietor had asked if he was a mint had explained that he had made a killing at the Hialeah races.

Whoever had killed him, Mr. Bassford reflected, had got away with so much money, apparently, that he could well afford to leave the four fifty-dollar bills as a blind.

He shook his head and picked

up the sheet marked "Howard Baylor." He wondered if Mrs. Baylor knew that her husband was completely washed up, and that even the sixteen-cylinder car was liable to be taken up some minutes after it went out of the Holland Tunnel. Would Baylor murder a man for—? Bassford shook his head again. For how much? That was the question.

The Perkinses there seemed to be no question about. He had carried mail for thirty years in San Francisco, had a small but adequate pension, with but slight expenses, and with Mrs. Perkins was spending his retirement in traveling.

The Lyonses lived on Cathedral Street, Baltimore. The landlady knew nothing about them except that Mr. Lyons was in business somewhere and his wife was a buyer in a cloak and suit house on Charles Street. His business took him around a good deal, and Mrs. Lyons went with him twice a year between seasons.

Young Baylor. Mr. Bassford hesitated. If he played the races he might be desperate.

The Smiths. Mr. Bassford smiled a little. Their name was Mr. and Mrs. Burton Forrest. They had eloped two days before and were terrified that their parents would find it out. Mrs. Forrest had run away from Miss Belt's school in Arden, Pennsylvania.

And finally the commonwealth attorney picked up a telegram that was dated from Saginaw, Michigan, and signed, "Registrar, Saginaw College." It read: "Glad to know whereabouts of Professor Porteus A. Harp. Please notify am forwarding his last two salary checks today."

Mr. Bassford shook his head wearily. He was wondering what the scientific method would be able to make out of them.

VII

Joan said goodnight to Dr. Harp, and bent forward giving Mrs. Dixon a sudden, impulsive kiss. "You've been *awfully* sweet to me!" she said, her eyes suspiciously bright. She ran upstairs quickly.

"She's got a blind spot in her left eye," she heard Jeff say cheerfully, and realized how silly it was for her to try to ignore anybody who was so objectionable as to refuse to be ignored.

All things being equal, she would have stayed in the cabin rather than accept anything from him or his family. But things weren't equal, and she had been more relieved than she cared to admit when both Dr. Harp and Mrs. Dixon had flatly refused to hear of her staying out in the cabin.

She closed the door behind her. The sight of the high four-poster made her realize that she

was so tired she could drop. Last night and this morning with its awful burden seemed years away. She was glad her father hadn't got back and that they hadn't been able to get in touch with him, now that everything was over. She took off her clothes, put on her pajamas, crawled into bed, and was asleep almost before she turned off the light.

Suddenly she sat bolt upright in the bed, wide awake, staring in the pitch-darkness, her heart pounding in her throat. She tried to listen, to focus her senses on the thing that had waked her, but her own beating heart deafened her ears. She tried to control herself, knowing with some instinct as old as the race that no noise had waked her, that it was something deeper than noise, some primitive urge of self-preservation. Her heart was quiet now, and her hands still, every taut nerve obedient.

After a long time she drew her feet up and let them slip over the side of the high bed, seeking the familiar ridges of the rag carpet. She went over in her mind the layout of the house. Jeff's room was behind hers, Mrs. Dixon's and Dr. Harp's were across the wide hall, divided by the narrow stairs leading to the third floor, where Julius Jones slept.

She put on her dressing gown, crept noiselessly across the floor to her bag, and felt among the soft folds of her clothes for her flashlight. There was still no sound.

She crept back to the bed and slipped across to the window, and knelt down there, peering out into the yard. The cabins only were dimly visible—"Arizona," on the end, where the Lyonses were, and "Idaho," with the Smiths. Her eyes, gradually accustoming themselves to the night, made out a shadow moving, and she waited, her cold hands steadying her body in the angle of the window frame. The shadow moved so slowly that Joan thought it was a trick of the dim night. Then she knew it wasn't.

It was the door of Glenn Lyon's cabin opening; and after a moment someone slipped out, so quickly that Joan lost him almost before she was sure who it was. She waited again, until she saw the dark shadow, almost invisible, slipping stealthily up the hill towards the hickory grove.

Joan stared a moment, wondering where he was going. It was the way she and Hal Baylor had gone that afternoon. Then she crept across the floor, felt for her shoes, and put them on. She tiptoed towards the door, put her hand on the brass knob and turned it quietly, tugging gently. The door did not move. Someone had locked her in. For an instant she stood there seething with anger, trying to think whether in all her life she had ever hated

anyone as much as she hated Jeff Dixon at that moment.

"He's got no right to treat me like this!" she whispered.

Something inside her, protesting violently, choked the faint, small voice of reason that tried to tell her she was a fool to leave that room.

"I'll just show him!" Joan said stubbornly.

She crept back across the room to the door at right angles to the side window. It would lead into Jeff's room. She held up her flash. Her heart gave a leap of joy when she saw the white-painted bolt. If only there wasn't another on the other side.

She put the flash in her pocket again and pulled gently at the bolt. It slipped back easily. Joan put her hand on the brass knob and turned it, hearing the dull click of the old lock bolts slipping out of place.

The black margin grew as the white door opened. If she could get through without waking him up! She took a step forward, caught her foot sharply against something, and drew back, waiting there in the dark, suddenly angrier than ever at him for making her be such an idiot.

Then she realized that he hadn't. As she listened there was no sound, and she realized that there was no one in that room—no one but herself. She put her hand in her pocket, took out the flash, and waited, listening. Then the yellow ball of light fell squarely on the big bed. Joan did not need to hold it here. One instant was enough to show her that the bed had not been slept in.

Joan stood there in the dark, feeling suddenly strange and a little frightened. Somewhere in the silent, dark recesses of the house a grandfather clock struck two.

Joan Acheson did not move, for suddenly, with a clarity that made the events of the previous day so plain that she couldn't imagine why she hadn't seen them before, the whole thing dawned on her. She caught her breath sharply, and the green eyes snapped in the dark of the silent room, and she could feel her cheeks flushing with hot anger.

It was a plant—and who was it that could have done it most easily? It was Jeff Dixon, who knew she was in "Florida." He would know the simple trick about changing the name boards. He was the last person up. He'd know she was going to be the first out in the morning. He even had an obvious motive for killing the man whose body had been left in her cabin. He didn't want his mother to sell the place. He had found out about it by taking the letter out of the secretary in the back parlor. And why didn't he want to sell it?

Joan thought suddenly of the caverns. She didn't understand,

but no doubt that was it. That was why. And it was also why he wouldn't let her and Hal Baylor go up there that afternoon, and why he was no doubt out there himself now.

The shadowy figure of Glenn Lyons slipping along the path beyond the cabins came back to her. Joan hesitated, and then made up her mind.

Later, when she tried to explain it to herself, she couldn't remember what it really was that had made her slip back to her room, get into some clothes, and creep back through Jeff's door into the hall and on down the steps.

But she kept on, and went softly downstairs. She crept along the garden path until she came to the shadowy stand of young corn beyond the kitchen orchard. She ran along quickly. There was no other sound that she could hear, and she, herself, ran lightly.

At the end of the long, dark row she stopped and peered out. The slope of the hill rose in front of her beyond the cow pasture fence, bare except for the few piles of boulders and the clump of hickory trees along past the gate.

When she left the shadow of the trees Joan went quietly, staying behind the fence, making her way towards the hickory grove. The gate was open, propped open a foot or so with a boulder. Joan slipped through it and stopped suddenly. Someone was running down the hill.

For one galvanized instant Joan stood rooted to the spot. Then, with an instinct as old as the hill above her, she sprang into the hickory grove and crouched down in the shadows. She knew without thinking about it that fear was in those flying steps and that danger was closer to her than it had ever been before. She held her breath.

The steps came nearer. She could hear the labored breathing of a man as he came out of the shadow of the grove, nearer and nearer. Joan's eyes, glued to the path, dilated with sudden terror. It was not Glenn Lyons, there, nor Jeff Dixon. It was someone shorter, heavy-set. She rose noiselessly to her feet as he went down the path, going slowly now, transformed instantly from a man fleeing in terror to one creeping stealthily into hiding.

Joan gripped the tree trunk as a terrible thought came to her. "Jeff!" she breathed.

In an instant she was out of the shadow of the grove, flying like the wind up the crooked trail, her heart sick with dread for the man she hated worse than anyone she had ever known. Her senses were sharpened with fear, not so much because of the look that she had sensed on Hal Baylor's face as he came dashing down the trail, as the sudden, crafty stealth that changed him,

once he was safely through the gate, and sent him suddenly creeping, catlike, along the corn back to the cabin at the end of the row.

She came up the path towards the clump of scrub oak beyond a narrow circle of heaped-up rock. It was halfway up the slope, not a hundred yards from the grove of hickories. Joan peered ahead of her, afraid, for some reason she could not express, to switch on her flash. She gripped it in her hand and ran on to the pile of rocks. Then she stopped.

"Jeff!" she cried.

Ahead of her, sprawled on his face on the ground, his body strangely and grotesquely huddled, he lay, quite motionless.

Joan sprang forward, knelt down, pulled the body over, and recoiled with a sharp, horrified cry, staring down in the dark at her hands, sick with loathing. They were wet and warm with something that she knew must be blood. Slowly she wiped them off on the grass behind her, fumbling with nerveless fingers for her flash. She pressed the switch and stared at the body in front of her.

It was not Jeff. It was Glenn Lyons. His eyes were open, staring back at her, but the stare was glazed and expressionless.

Joan backed away. Lyon's body fell back, face down in the soil.

Joan did not hear anyone come up behind her. She was still alone in the night with this thing, until she felt a hand on her shoulder. She looked up slowly. Jeff was looking down at her, incredibly unbelieving.

Joan stared dumbly at him. "I was afraid it was you!" she whispered.

"Me?"

She nodded, unconscious of the horrified question in the face he bent to hers as he lifted her to her feet. She stood looking down at the dead man. Then doubt and terror seeped gradually into her own face. She turned back to him.

"Jeff. You didn't—not *you!"*

"Me?"

He held her round chin up toward him, gazing down into her eyes. "Didn't *you?"*

Joan shrank back. "Oh, *no!* I *found* him like this. I came out because—because you locked me in!"

For a moment — it seemed years to Joan—Jeff Dixon stood there silent, looking down the hill with grim, abstracted eyes. Then he turned back to her.

"Look, Joan." His voice was hard, but there was something in it that Joan had not heard there before. "I want you to tell me something, just because I've got to know. It won't make any difference, Joan. I'll do anything you want me to. But I've got to know. Did you? Oh, I know you didn't. You couldn't!"

Joan shook her head and

stretched her hand out timidly until her finger tips brushed his cheek.

"Jeff! *We* didnt do this! It was Harold Baylor. I saw him running down the hill." She said it in a hushed voice.

Jeff looked at her for a moment. "I saw him," he said. Then he shook his head. His hand moved to Joan's and took the round, black cylinder gently out of it. She let him have it, and watched him turn the yellow beam slowly over the bloody wound under Glenn Lyon's shoulder blade.

"Stabbed from behind," he said.

He swung the ball of light past the body to where Joan had wiped her hands on the grass, and beyond that to the pile of broken rocks above them. He held it there a moment, and Joan suddenly knew where they were.

"Is that the sinkhole?" she whispered.

Jeff nodded. The white circle of the flash in his hand held steadily on one spot, and Joan felt his body tense sharply. She followed as he strode across the inert heap towards the rocks and looked down where the beam was focused on a single dark red splotch glistening on the smooth gray surface of the stone.

"It's blood!" she whispered.

He nodded again. Before she knew what he was doing he stepped over the low barrier down onto the first step of the sinkhole. The cold air came up around them like an icy blanket. Jeff turned back to her.

"Go down to the house," he said curtly. "You'll be all right there. You go back to your room and go to bed."

She drew back involuntarily, bewildered and suddenly angry. He went on down into the cavern. She could see the beam of light faintly for an instant, then it had disappeared.

VIII

Joan stood there an instant, stunned, helpless, and furious. Then she looked back at the dead man. Something glinted under his shoulder. She went back to him, bent down, and picked the object up. It was his flashlight. Joan wondered suddenly if Lyons had planned to go down into the cavern, too.

In another instant she had stepped over the stone barrier and was shivering as she slipped down the narrow mouth of the cavern through the tiny corridor. Her flash revealed a small, low room with short, rudimentary stalactites hanging from the grayish white ceiling, and stalagmites no bigger than goblin garden toadstools on the floor. Joan peered around. It was not the first cavern she had been in. She had been in most of the celebrated ones in the states. But this

was small and unknown and unlighted, and it was a different matter.

She turned off her lamp and tried to see Jeff's light through the narrow openings that must lead on into the heart of the hill. Then she lighted hers again. There were two openings, one to the left and one directly ahead. She took the one ahead and crept forward, scraping her head against the cold, wet, nubbly ceiling as she went, treading carefully to keep from slipping on the steep incline as the opening lengthened into a narrow corridor before it came out into a large room.

For a moment Joan forgot the crimson splotch on the stone outside, and stood waving her light up at the lovely white cascade of limestone veils that hung down from the ceiling of the room, her light playing over it like a golden ball on the snow.

Suddenly she felt a sharp pang of loneliness. "Jeff!" she called softly.

There was no sound but the echo of her own voice, no light but the yellow shaft as she turned anxiously now from one dark, glistening pillar to another.

Then in the overwhelming silence she heard a footstep, and turned around, not knowing which way to go to find it. There was no one in the room.

"Jeff!" she called. A far, hollow note came back: *"Jeff!"*

Joan let the flashlight out, and blinked, listening, in the solid unrelieved black that surrounded her. There was no sound.

She took a deep breath and shook her head.

"Do you realize, my pet, that you've already probably lost yourself in a labyrinth, and that Mr. Lyons's flashlight will probably run out before you get out?" she said softly. "You'll also probably fall in a hole and break your leg, or hit a stalactite and break your neck. I should go back immediately if I were you."

She breathed deeply again and decided for once to take her own advice.

She flashed the light on and went back up the narrow incline. Or it looked like the narrow incline. But in a dozen steps she was going down instead of up, and at the next step her feet suddenly shot out from under her and she was crashing down a steep slope. She clutched the light frantically. Then she stopped as suddenly as she had begun, on the hard, wet floor of a lower cave.

Joan closed her eyes, her heart a cold lump in her throat, her body bruised and aching. She pressed the switch on the light. The room, as far as she could see, was precisely like the one above, and she turned the light off. It was already, or she had imagined it, fainter than at first.

Joan shook her head. "Thank

God, I didn't lose it, anyway," she whispered. Her voice was sharp and sibilant in the dark.

She lay there a moment, listening, wondering what to do next, and held her breath. Someone was there, in the room, near her. She could hear a breath as sharply sibilant as her own. It kept on when hers was still, at slow, uneven intervals, like someone old or out of breath.

Joan suddenly pressed the button on the flash. The light leaped out as she swept it round, bringing into being a room wide and deep and heavily pillared, filled with broken lengths of stone and stalagmites. She raised the light above her. From the ceiling the stone growths hung down like misshapen, dwarfed forms, unfriendly, terrifying. Her light moved round. She could no longer hear the heavy breathing.

Then the beam of light jerked and faltered, and Joan Acheson gave a low gasp of horror. Then she steadied the beam, exerting all the power of her soul. Hanging from one of the misshapen stone growths not ten feet from her, was the body of a man. It was fully clothed, and above the collar a sightless, oddly blackened face stared down at her. It was old and shriveled and very lifeless.

"Jeff! Jeff!"

Joan shrieked, covering her face with her hands.

The empty echo came back: *"Jeff! Jeff!"*

The sharp, sibilant breath behind her loosened again, and a man moved, watching the terror-frozen girl with shrewd, cold eyes.

Joan's breath came in hard, dry sobs. "Jeff!" she whispered, so pitifully low that there was no echo.

It seemed an hour to Joan before she was able to pull herself together and get to her knees. Her ankle ached poisonously. She kept the flashlight off, because she feared, far worse than the dark shape hanging there, dangling, dripping, that the battery would run out and leave her still more helpless than she already was.

Then again came the breathing. In the horror of that grotesquely dreadful sight above her she had forgotten that. But nothing living could be so terrible as the dead. She gripped the light and moistened her lips.

"Who—who is it?" she said. But no sound came from her throat. She tried to swallow, to speak again. "Who is it?" Her voice came. There was no answer.

Joan moved a little again, put her hand up over her head and got slowly to her feet. Then there was more than the breathing. There was the sound of someone treading behind her; and she whirled quickly about, stabbing the beam of yellow light out into

the horrible darkness. Her arm came hard against a slender, hanging shaft. There was a sharp crack and the crash of falling stone.

Joan swept the beam desperately from right to left as the crash echoed back from the walls, so loud and reverberating that Jeff Dixon, in the chambers above, stopped, trying to fix the source of it. But no one was in sight of the boring shaft of light.

Then Joan turned the beam down to the ground at her feet to make certain that she did not go down another slide, and suddenly held it there motionless. A little mound of rock had fallen apart at the impact of the stone she had knocked off the ceiling, and lying there in the middle of it she saw a sodden, bulging leather bag.

She hesitated a moment and bent forward to pick it up. Just as she did so Mr. Lyon's flashlight burned out; and as she stood there in the pitch-black, her heart pounding like mad, a voice just behind her in the dark spoke softly:

"How unfortunate, my dear, after I so carefully locked you in!"

IX

For a lightning instant Joan Acheson's heart rose in a great burst of relief—and as suddenly almost ceased its beating.

The kindly, familiar voice was still gentle, but under it was a steely, serpent smoothness as cold and inhuman as the pillars of stone that peopled the unendurable darkness of the cavern. She stood motionless. Death must be like this, she thought. Or was it all a ghastly nightmare and the darkness around her that made shafts of red light shoot through her aching eyeballs—just something she had dreamed?

"And fancy your finding—so accidentally — what I've been hunting for — let me see — for three years now. Dear, dear! I'm afraid it shows that while the scientific method will eventually triumph, accident often permits us a short cut."

Joan pushed the damp curls off her burning forehead with slow-motion fingers of ice.

"Dr.—Dr. Harp?" It couldn't be! Oh, it couldn't be!

But his voice went on. "I notice, my dear, that you saw the other cave dweller."

A broad, white beam of light shot directly on the shrunken, gibbeted figure, suspended motionless from the cavern ceiling.

Joan shuddered violently and tried to speak. The question that she could not have asked was answered before her mouth was opened.

"No, no. For that I am not responsible. I assure you, my dear. I simply guessed what happened when he was never found."

"Who is it?"

Joan's voice was quiet; something that had no relation to her tight, frozen throat, as if it was just a thought that took shape in the air.

"Who?" Dr. Harp repeated gently. "Why, who indeed but Mr.—Dear, dear, I'd almost forgotten his name. Gage. Mr. Gage, my dear. He was president of the Farmer's Bank in Roanoke. And there, my dear"—the white ball of light surrounded the sodden leather bag in its nest of shattered limestone—"is undoubtedly one hundred and ten thousand dollars. In cash. There is also a ticket to the Argentine Republic."

Dr. Harp's quiet chuckle struck into Joan's groping brain like an icicle.

"You see the advantages of the scientific method, my child. The papers were full of it. The robbery of the bank, the disappearance of the president, the apprehending of the teller at the Haunted Bridge Tourist Camp, the energetic efforts of the splendid commonwealth attorney. But no money — no president — trail cold.

"Now, my profession, my dear, has led me through this country many times, and I postulated the simple premise that if the bank president, who undoubtedly had the money, were not above ground, then he must be below. And in a country full of caverns, why not? And obviously not a public cavern—therefore a private. What could be simpler? And, since the trail ended here, what more natural than this cavern?"

"You—you found him?"

"I found him, my dear. I found him my second visit. Let me see. The robbery was in November. I came here on Christmas vacation, and again in Easter, and I found him Easter Day. No one but myself ever came here—and I found him. As you see, he had hanged himself by his belt. Because he was a lost man, my dear. In his left-hand coat pocket he has a Richmond newspaper, with his picture, a reproduction of his fingerprints, an account of the teller's confession, and even an account of the ticket to the Argentine taken under an assumed name.

"I'm afraid he naturally saw it was all quite hopeless—and so, like Judas, he went and hanged himself. And there he is. And there he will be forever and forever."

The great white beam played again on the motionless black figure; and, as Dr. Harp went on, Joan Acheson could sense that he was shaking his head regretfully.

"What a stalactite he will make in a thousand years, my dear! 'The Hanging Bank President!' "

Dr. Harp made a strange little clucking sound with his tongue against his teeth.

"But I'm really distressed about you, my dear. You see—I have no compunction about taking this money. Teaching is a very unsatisfactory profession financially, and robbery is equally so morally. So I have concluded that in a combination of the two the moral disadvantage of robbery will be offset by the moral prestige of teaching, while financially the disadvantages of teaching will be compensated for by the advantages of robbery.

"I don't know if you follow me, my dear. But that's the value of logic. Women and laymen are silenced by it. It sounds so well."

Joan Acheson sat down on a rock by the leather bag. Her knees seemed to have disappeared. But her brain had stopped whirling, and she was thinking, desperately and clearly. If anything would help, it was to keep him talking.

"Mr. Lyons?" she asked calmly.

"Oh, Lyons," said Dr. Harp. "Mr. Lyons, in a way, had precisely the same idea in mind. So did Mr. Rose, who I believe must have had some connection with the bank gang — because Mr. Rose was quite incapable of doing even the rudimentary thinking of Mr. Bassford. Mr. Lyons is employed by a bonding company that had to pay out a good deal of money. He's been coming here quite as long as I have. But it was quite accidental, which my coming was not. And Mr. Lyons furthermore made the mistake—until just this evening—of making perfunctory investigations, and those above ground.

"He did offer me a fee if I came on anything of interest in my researches. Dear, dear, what nitwits men of action think pedagogues are! It is true he did become suspicious at the end. Then that young snip, Baylor, got wind of something and trailed Jeff most of the day—ever since their fight over you, my dear. That is, he trailed him until he found Lyon's body. Then he either became frightened or thought that he had something on Dixon at last. Lucky for him he turned back when he did."

Dr. Harp chuckled again, and Joan took a long, sickening breath. The man was mad.

For the second time Dr. Harp answered an unspoken thought. "No, no," he said patiently, "I'm very sane, my dear. The lives of men like Rose and Lyons mean nothing to me. You wouldn't hesitate to kill a spider. But to the scientific mind most spiders are more admirable than some men. I don't insist on that as a philosophy, however. No doubt it's merely my own rationalization of the unfortunate necessity of getting them out of the way."

Dr. Harp was silent for a moment. Somewhere water dripped, softly and monotonously, as it had dripped two hundred thou-

sand years to build up the dark stone forest in which they stood.

Joan Acheson's heart suddenly leaped and beat furiously, for somewhere in the black recesses of the room there was a tiny sound, the sound of a soft, padded footfall. She breathed deeply and as quietly as she could, and gripped the stone on which she sat to keep her hands from shaking so that Dr. Harp wouldn't know.

"The regrettable thing, my dear, and the only one, is—well, frankly, you. I really don't want to harm you. It's curiously but definitely true that no teacher can harm his charges and remain honorable in his own sight, and, after all, I have taught you something—I trust—about the scientific method. You are possibly my only blunder. If the scientific method took cognizance of fate, I could easily regard you as fate here."

Joan breathed slowly in the overpowering blackness. Her ears, keyed to their keenest pitch, could hear the almost silent steps, and they were coming nearer, infinitely cautious. And then a great chill swept down her spine as she realized that Dr. Harp could not hear them.

He went slowly on. "You see, both Lyons and Rose sought my professional help, and Rose, in the vernacular, was attempting to double-cross me. He wrote to me the same time he wrote to Mrs. Dixon—a very charming lady—and I agreed to meet him. By a curious chance, I set the place of our meeting in the cabin called 'Florida,' at 2 a. m. that night. The cabins, of course, were never more than a third full, if that. Why Jeff had to put you in 'Florida,' when four others were all vacant is something the scientific method cannot answer.

"However, it was too late to change my plans. When I saw you leave your cabin, the light on your hair made it look white. I think very quickly, my dear, as you may have noticed, and I saw my chance. I changed your bags and the signs. I really had no intentions of killing Mr. Rose. In fact, I had no means of killing him, if it had not been for a queer accidental happening which I trust I shall not have to explain to you.

"I thought that Mr. Rose—a very stupid man, my dear—could be turned aside. But he knew too much, and he was suspicious. He informed me, very foolishly, that he was prepared to buy the whole place, just on a gamble, and turn everybody out, including, of course, myself. He showed me twelve thousand dollars that he had in cash. I knew of course that Mrs. Dixon would sell for much less. I had only two courses of action—if I did not wish to give up the prospect of a hundred and ten thousand dollars. And while one of them would

have kept Rose out and worked out very well for the Dixons, it would have worked out equally badly for me."

Joan could sense Dr. Harp shaking his head in the silent room.

"The alternative was to rid myself of Rose, and I chose it. I then 'planted' him, as they say, on the white-haired lady, of course changing the signs back later on, crumpling the bed sheets, putting the billfold in your car, and so on. I figured idly that you might be up and out of the way before they found him. Or not—it was immaterial. That was your problem.

"I figured that it could easily have been baffling to the surely very low intellects of the local authorities. But then I saw you in the morning. You were a mere child, and furthermore your father was a prominent figure. It was quite impossible, both from the idealistic and the practical side, to have you accused.

"So, as you know, I threw my reasoning—and my prior knowledge — on your side. I thought after that of implicating the Baylors—most objectionable people—and should have been able to do it. But things moved too quickly. That was the point, of course, of taking Mr. Rose's letter from the secretary. However, I had also learned that such a course could be definitely a boomerang, as indeed it turned out in your case. So I simply let things work themselves out. And I dare say they will."

There was no sound in the darkness pressing in on them.

"How?" said Joan.

Dr. Harp did not answer for a moment. Then he said, "I don't suppose you could see your way clear to going back to earth—we should become a Proserpine and Pluto, in a sense — and saying nothing about all this? Could you?"

Joan's heart gave a wild lunge. If she promised she might be safe. But she hesitated—too long.

"No; I see you couldn't," said Dr. Harp. "I didn't think you could. So you see there are only two courses for me — both of them unpalatable. I must either kill you or leave you here—I notice your light has gone out, and you would be surprised at how involved this cavern is. To die in the dark! Dear, dear! I do wish you'd stayed in your room! I locked you up so carefully, assuming that you'd have more modesty than to go through Jeff's room at night."

The name beat through Joan's brain — and with it the quick thought that of course Jeff didn't even know she was in the cavern. He'd think that she had gone back, as he had told her to.

"I'm afraid I've been pretty—obstinate," she said.

It was so terrible—but still so preposterous, standing there in

the dark cavern, the blackness relieved fitfully as the little man switched his light off and on.

"You've made it very difficult," Dr. Harp said earnestly.

Somewhere in the tomblike silence of the caverns the water dripped slowly on. *Drip, drip, drip.* It must have been the eternal monotony of it that had made the man hanging there rigid, contorted, not twenty feet from her head, finally lose his nerve.

And suddenly all the warm young blood in her veins welled up in passionate protest. She didn't want to die. Not alone in this inky blackness — with that awful thing hanging there. *No! No!* her heart cried.

Joan sprang to her feet. "Oh, *no!*" she sobbed. *"Jeff! Jeff!"*

The beam of Dr. Harp's light fell full and dazzling on her face, and she could hear the little man take a step towards her.

"I'm sorry, my dear," he said, his voice even more cold and steely than before. "I'm truly sorry. But what other course is open to me?" He advanced a few more steps.

Joan struggled for control, but another sob broke from her lips. "You seemed so nice and kind—"

Dr. Harp sighed. "I always have been. I was to you, too, until you insisted on getting in my way. Now it's either you or I—and I've gone to such lengths to get this wealth. You wouldn't expect me to give it all up now, would you, my dear?"

The light was still blinding Joan, but she thought from the sound of his voice that he must be closer. She stumbled backwards, and this time she gave way to her terror, gave way completely.

"Jeff! Jeff!" she called, her voice rising to a tremulous scream.

Then, as Joan shrank back against the stone behind her, a second beam shone for an instant blindingly in the great room, not ten feet from her. There was a rush of catlike feet, and Jeff Dixon sprang barefooted across the slippery ground between him and Dr. Harp.

Joan screamed. Dr. Harp swung around, his gold-headed stick sweeping into the air. Too late! Jeff's hands descended on his wrists, and tightened relentlessly. The stick and the flashlight clattered to the ground. A broad white beam shot across the floor of the cavern, and Joan, scrambling forward, picked up the flashlight and turned the beam full on the two.

Dr. Harp stood quite still, his breath coming in sharp gusts. "Ah, well," he said calmly. "The scientific method is useless here."

"Quite," said Jeff.

He brought the little man's wrists together and held them with one hand while he ran the other over his pockets.

"I am not armed," Dr. Harp said.

Then Jeff reached down to Joan and pulled her to her feet.

Together they stared at the chubby little man, and Jeff looked curiously down at the sodden leather bag. He looked back at Dr. Harp and shook his head.

"You forgot I spent my childhood exploring these caves," he said.

Dr. Harp nodded calmly. "Do you think I might have my stick, my dear? My bad knee—"

He held out his hand, and Joan placed the cane in it, never taking her eyes, still wide and dazed, from his round little face. For an instant Dr. Harp stood, both hands on the gold head of the stick, the under hand fumbling a little. Then suddenly without warning he raised a capsule to his lips.

Jeff sprang forward.

Dr. Harp shuddered a little. "Too late, my boy," he said coolly. "You see, even in the scientific method one must be prepared for errors, and accept the consequences. Death isn't necessarily the most terrible."

He moved a step, still holding firmly to his stick. His breath came quickly. Fine beads of perspiration stole out on his forehead, like myriads of tiny specks bright in the beam of white light.

"Just one thing, Jeff—for you and your mother—to help you both. Don't sell the cave! Mr. Henson's coming tomorrow—today, now, I fancy. He consulted me. He's attorney for the Pearly Caverns across the bridge. Your next rooms here happen to be some thirty-five feet from them in a direct line."

Perspiration bathed his forehead and the veins at his temples stood out in purple ridges.

"They're worth a hundred thousand to them, Jeff! They're little gems, your rooms. Don't sell! Lease them on a royalty basis—say ten cents a visitor. They—they had a hundred thousand last year. But don't sell!"

He clutched his cane. One trembling hand moved down the shank. He spoke again with a last desperate effort: "The weapon, Jeff! I must leave it all—tidy."

Dr. Harp's breath rattled horribly in his throat as he reeled forward, tottered, and lurched suddenly to the ground. As he went down, the stick sprang from his hands and rolled across the wet stones with a sharp, metallic clang.

For an instant Jeff and Joan stood staring down at it. Out of the innocent shank protruded a thin, murderous knife, the blade mottled with dark stains. Dr. Harp's fingers twitched sharply once and were still—forever.

The light in Joan's hand wavered tremulously, and steadied again as Jeff's arm closed protectingly around her.

a perfect target

by Lawrence G. Blochman

In Tokyo, when the lights are dim, conspirators who know no other land must reckon with Fred Forest.

A SLIM, red-headed figure in a tropical worsted suit, Fred Forest walked rapidly through the luminous haze of a summer morning. The frown between his reddish eyebrows and the worried look in his grave blue eyes were out of tune with the smiling aspect of Tokyo—a vast sea of gray-tiled roofs seeming to undulate slightly in the blinding sunshine, a flashing of light on the wings of dragon flies, a sound of laughter in the tortuous streets.

Forest climbed a slight eminence to push through a tiny garden into a two-story house. He passed through a room piled high with bronze Buddhas, stacks of brocade, and carved ivories, crossed a narrow hall, and came upon Martin at the breakfast table.

Martin had a coffee cup in one hand. With the other he was arranging cards in a game of solitaire. He was a small man, with an Adam's apple that bulged prominently in a long neck. A patch of very red lip showed through a meagre dark mustache

Lawrence G. Blochman was a frequent contributor to ADVENTURE *in the days of its early renown, where his spirited mystery-in-far-lands crime yarns contended for glory with T. S. Stribling's immortal Poggioli, whose newest triumphs it has been our privilege to publish. His fame as a top echelon craftsman has been recently consolidated by some superb fictional studies in criminal jurisprudence, lethally documented with medical case histories. Here is a saga in his colorful mystery-intrigue vein, embroidered with a wonderful humor.*

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which seemed a trifle moth-eaten. He squinted at Forest through the smoke from a cigarette drooping at the corner of his mouth.

"Out early, aren't you, Forest?" he asked.

Forest tossed a packet of compactly folded papers to the table, sat down, and ran his fingers through his red hair.

"I went out to buy the vernacular sheets," he said. "I wanted to see what they had to say about a two-line item in this morning's *Advertiser.* Has that new English-speaking clerk come yet?"

Martin nodded toward the *fusama,* the sliding paper partition that led to the kitchen. From behind the screen emanated the soulful, if tinny, strains of music blown from a harmonica.

"He's in there," said Martin, "giving a concert for the cook."

"Call him," said Forest. "I want him to translate something."

"Momonoki!" Martin shouted.

The music continued. In a rough way, the tune resembled "East Side, West Side."

"Momonoki!" Martin repeated. There was no answer. He arose abruptly and slid aside the *fusama* to reveal a Japanese youth in a black and white kimono. The lad had a small harmonica pressed against his protruding lips. "Come in here when you're called!" said Martin.

"Excuse unhearing deafness," said Momonoki, slipping his harmonica into his ample kimono sleeve and rising to his feet. He was a solemn-faced youth who at times appeared twenty-five, at times fifteen. He said he was nineteen—which meant eighteen by occidental count, since a Japanese child is considered one year old the day after its birth. His hair was clipped close. His apparently lidless eyes peered at Forest through thick-lensed spectacles.

"You are first time I have witnessed American with crimson hairs," he said, staring at Forest as though fascinated. "I am Momonoki. Please pronounce me youah name."

"My name's Forest. Now I want—"

"Forest? How co-incidence. My name in part is Momonoki, meaning peach tree. Forest and Peach Tree . . ."

"Read these papers," said Forest, impatiently pushing the packet across the table, "and translate for me anything you see regarding the robbery at the National Arts Museum yesterday. It's extremely urgent."

Martin dropped his cigarette stub into his coffee cup. It died with a short hiss.

Momonoki rattled the papers.

"With immense types," he said, "Newspapah *Nichi-nichi* cries National Arts Museum shamefully robberied . . . Two ivory *netsuké* lended to museum from private ownings of Emper-

or for short time exhibiting, have been stealed . . ."

"What do the other papers say?" interrupted Forest.

"Great indignant in all press-works," said Momonoki, turning over the pages, "*Asahi* cry big insulting to Emperor . . . *Jiji Shimpo* making huge rewarding of five thousand yen for clutching stealers . . . Police sending beg-pardon to palace . . . Museum—ah—museum—How is English word? Manager?"

"Curator."

"Museum curator, five helping curators, and nineteen janitors anticipate to resignation tomorrow if *netsuké* not homecoming."

Martin lighted another cigarette in silence. Forest nodded gravely. He wanted to know if there was a description of the *netsuké*. Yes, said Momonoki. The *Jiji Shimpo* said that not only had the *netsuké* great historical value through having graced the cords of tobacco pouches used by former Emperors of Japan, but they were great works of art. One of the ivory buttons was a minute carving of a landscape garden, complete with bridges, lanterns, and a five-story pagoda, and was signed by Hoshin of Kyoto. The other was a life-like miniscule representation of two samurai in a death struggle. It was the work of the great Shuzan.

"No mention of anyone suspected?" asked Forest.

"Profound mysterious," said Momonoki. "However, police overflowing with hope as well as chagrin."

"Thanks," said Forest, getting up, and gently pushing Momonoki back into the kitchen. He closed the *fusama*. Five seconds later the strains of what was probably intended to be "East Side West Side" again came wheezily from behind the screen.

Forest turned to see Martin regarding him with curious expectancy.

"After that," said Forest, "I guess there's no need of my telling you that the ivories Strange brought me last night for appraisal are the Emperor's *netsuké* stolen from the museum."

"Not the slightest need," said Martin. His bulging eyes narrowed slightly.

"What do you intend to do about it?"

"I? Nothing at all."

Forest stood up.

"Then I'd better take the *netsuké* back to the museum," he said.

Martin also got to his feet.

"Strange was a fool to leave the *netsuké* with you," he said. "But that's no reason for you to make a fool of yourself also. Sit down."

"For the sake of our past association, and for the firm," Forest continued, "I'm willing to give Strange a chance to get away, but—"

"Sit down!" Martin barked. Forest hesitated a moment, then obeyed. Martin held out his hand. "Now give me those ivories!" he ordered.

Forest pressed his lips together.

"Be reasonable, Martin," he said after a pause. "You certainly aren't going to sacrifice your honesty and the honesty of the firm for the sake of a pair of ivory buttons whose intrinsic value can't be more than four or five thousand at most, no matter how great their sentimental value to the Japanese. You—"

"Listen," interrupted Martin. "You're an art expert. I brought you over here to tell me when a print or carving was real or phoney, and, when phoney, to tell me how much like what original it was. You're fine at that sort of thing. You know your dates and names and market values. But as for the administration of this business—keep your nose out."

Forest pushed back his chair and stood up again. His lips were colorless.

"I've got my reputation to think of," he said, in a tight voice, "with collectors—the antiquarians and scholars. I can't afford—"

Forest moved forward suddenly to brush past Martin. Martin caught his right arm to pull him back. Forest whirled, swung with his left. Martin ducked, then lunged to butt the wind out of Forest.

Forest stepped back, gasping. When he recovered his breath, he seized Martin by the throat, lifted him clear off the floor, and started to shake him. Martin emitted a surprised gurgle.

Then darkness descended upon Forest in a great, roaring, flashing wave of pain. He relaxed his strangle hold and folded up like an accordion. He did not know what had hit him. He had not seen Strange come up behind to swing the barrel of a revolver against the back of his skull.

Strange stood astride the fallen red-head, looking down at him with expressionless eyes that seemed opaque. He was so tall that he had to stoop to clear the low lintels of Japanese doorways. He had no chin to speak of, and very little hair. His vaulted bald area was spangled with perspiration. He breathed audibly through his broad nose.

"So-o-o?" he exclaimed. "Trouble?"

He spoke in a thin, tenor drawl, surprisingly puerile for one of his bulk. His blurred t's and a tendency to prolong his o's indicated a Central European origin.

Martin was bending over the prone Forest, going through his pockets. He extracted a small case, opened it to disclose two exquisitely carved bits of ivory, as

large as hazelnuts, nestling in cotton.

"He had an attack of honesty," said Martin. "He wants to take these *netsuké* back to the museum."

Strange shook his head.

"I always to-old you I didn't like that honest look in his eyes," he said.

"This is your fault!" snapped Martin. "With the whole National Arts Museum to choose from, why did you have to pick on the Emperor's collection? Dumb as you are, you surely know how the Japanese feel about the Emperor. The vernacular press is in an uproar, the police are out for blood, the museum staff is going to resign, and I wouldn't be surprised if there were a government crisis—all because you insulted the Son of Heaven by stealing a couple of his heirlooms. God help us if they find these here. Five successful years of traffic in stolen antiques, to say nothing of the unexplained death of that Yokohama collector—"

"I could put them back," interrupted Strange. "I do-o-n't think it would be hard."

"Give me a hand here," said Martin, putting the *netsuké* into his pocket and bending down to grasp Forest under the arm pits. "He's starting to come to. We'll carry him upstairs and tie him to his bed until we decide what we're going to do with him."

When Forest had been made fast to his own bed with ropes of rice straw, Martin and Strange returned to the dining room.

"Of course, I wouldn't *like* to put them back," Strange resumed in his whining voice, "but if you—"

"Listen," said Martin. "You don't realize what a mess you've got us into. This may seem like an ordinary, run-of-the-mill larceny to you, but to the rest of Tokyo it's practically sacrilege. An ordinary larceny probably wouldn't have come to the attention of our red-headed friend, who's been too wrapped up in his books to know what's been going on around him. But now that he's got his eyes open, we've got to shut his mouth."

"O-o-o Kay," said Strange, laying his automatic on the table. "When?"

"Put that away," said Martin. "You're too ready with that gun of yours. It's pure luck you're still here after that stupid murder of Kato in Yokohama."

"That wasn't stupid. They didn't catch me, did they?"

"Never mind," said Martin. "This situation is going to be handled with intelligence. That means, by me. Knowing Forest, I think I can bargain with him for a promise of silence."

"A promise," droned Strange, "ain't worth much this year."

"Forest's is," said Martin. "He's one of these rare boobs

who'd break a leg rather than break his word. Of course, if he won't bargain, then we'll have to use different methods. But you leave this to me. Bring the brandy and we'll go up and revive him."

Forest needed no reviving. He was not only conscious, but actively engaged in trying to escape from the bonds that held him to his bed. He stopped squirming long enough to bestow an uncompromising glance upon Martin.

"Forest," said Martin, "Strange has just pointed out to me that there's a perfect case against you for the theft of the Emperor's *netsuké*. Now, if it's apparent to Strange, it certainly—"

"Against me?" Forest broke in.

"Yes," Martin replied. "You were in the museum yesterday—"

"Only in the curator's office. I didn't go anywhere except to the curator's office."

"I have witnesses who saw you hovering about the Emperor's collection," said Martin. "Japanese witnesses, whose testimony in court would outweigh yours, particularly as you've been expertising stolen goods for the past five months."

"That's a lie!"

"Half the stuff you've handled for us has been stolen," said Martin quietly. "I have your signature on a certificate guaranteeing the authenticity of some Hokusai prints stolen from Baron Iwata. I have your signature on certificates for some rare sword *tsubó* stolen from a man who was murdered in Yokohama."

Martin paused to watch the effect of his announcement. Forest moistened his lips but said nothing.

"In spite of the perfect case against you," Martin continued, "I'll do you the favor of keeping quiet, if you return the compliment by giving me your word that you'll forget you ever saw the Emperor's *netsuké*."

Forest continued silent. He stared unseeing at the ceiling.

"Well?' prompted Martin.

"If you'll cut these damned ropes," said Forest at last, "I might talk to you."

Martin bent over the knots. Strange came closer to glower at Forest. Released, Forest sat up, rubbing himself.

"I can't make any such promise," he said slowly. "A guilty secret like that would make me an accomplice."

"You're already an accomplice," said Martin. "Would you rather be arrested as a thief?"

"I'd take the chance," Forest replied thoughtfully. "It wouldn't make any difference, as long as I'm not actually a thief. I've been acting in good faith."

"Then you're turning down our proposition?"

"I'll make you a counter-proposition," said Forest. "Give me an inventory showing what

part of our present stock has been stolen and from where. I'll say nothing about it for twenty-four hours. That will give you plenty of time to get out of the country."

Strange gave vent to a derisive, treble laugh.

Martin growled: "You've got a lot of crust, wanting to dictate terms to us."

"Think it over," said Forest gravely. "Go down and talk about it between you. I'll wait here. I give you my word."

"Come on," said Martin, taking Strange by the arm.

When they had gone, Forest sat at a table, filled a page with writing, folded it, and slipped it into an envelope. He addressed the envelope and placed it between the pages of a Japanese-English dictionary.

Downstairs Martin poured two glasses of port and spiked his own with brandy.

"I think I better take these damned buttons right to Hong Kong," Strange was saying. "I think I better get them out of the country."

"What good will that do," said Martin, swallowing his port at a single gulp, "as long as the Still Small Voice upstairs is ready to turn into a loud speaker the first chance he gets?"

"So-o-o what?" inquired Strange.

"We'll have to get rid of both Forest and the *netsuké,*" Martin said in low tones.

"O-o-o Kay," Strange grinned and reached for his hip. Martin laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Listen," said Martin. "You let me plan this. We've got to use strategy, to keep ourselves in the clear. The *netsuké* must be found on the corpse. A gun, too, if possible. That will make a perfect picture: The thief, trying to escape, killed in a running fight."

"Too bad," Strange shook his head. "Too damn bad to lose tho-ose *netsuké.* Think of the prestige they would give us with our customers in Hong Kong."

"It will be easier to plant the gun," said Martin, "if we can stall until after dark. Let me see—" He looked up, startled.

The bell on the front gate jingled lightly. Martin arose. He stopped the cook in the hall and went to the entrance himself. A Japanese stood there, a Japanese in European clothes with a slightly-wilted white linen collar.

"I am detective," the Japanese announced. "I am K. Omura of Honjo police station. I give you my card."

"Come in, Mr. Omura," said Martin. "I suppose you're here regarding the museum robbery. Meet Mr. Strange."

The detective bowed from the waist. He spoke slowly, as he drew from his pocket a number of circulars printed in Japanese.

"These are new police regula-

tions," he said. "We must inspect all curio, arts, and antique merchants in Tokyo. No art dealer can leave Tokyo without permit. You cannot make exports for one month. You must report in writing all buying and selling."

"I hope you find the missing *netsuké,* Mr. Omura," said Martin, carelessly putting both hands into his pockets. "We will be glad to co-operate."

"Otherwise," said the detective, "director of police bureau must resign to emperor in three days. Please show me your stocks."

For the next half hour the detective dug among the collected specimens in the adjoining room. He made notes. When he had finished he emerged and paused at the foot of the stairway.

"What is upstairs?" he asked.

"Just living quarters," said Martin. "Nobody's up there."

At the same moment a blast of tinny music floated down from the upper floor. A succession of chords, inhaled and exhaled, followed, to make an enthusiastic rendition of "When the Moonlight is Softly Shining," on a harmonica.

"Nobody?" queried the detective.

"Unless it's our clerk," amended Martin. "He sometimes goes up there to practice his music. Would you like to go up?"

The detective paused with one foot on the bottom step.

"You have other member of this house?" he inquired.

"There's Mr. Forest," said Martin. "He's out right now. We expect him back at any time. Would you like to wait?"

"I will come back," said the detective. "I must inspect your house one time, maybe two times each day. I must now inspect other houses. Good-bye."

When K. Omura had gone, Martin, followed by Strange, bounded up the stairs. They found Momonoki kneeling on the floor of Forest's room, working lustily on his harmonica. The Japanese youth had come up to translate an item on the *netsuké* robbery from the latest edition of the *Hochi Shimbun.* He had remained to discuss the relative merits of the bamboo flute, of which he was very fond, and the increasingly popular occidental instrument, the harmonica. He had learned several American airs from the book of instructions given away free with the instrument. He would play some of them.

"Stop that racket!" bellowed Martin, as he and Strange entered the room. Momonoki's solo ended with a wheeze.

"I overheard some of what went on downstairs just now," said Forest.

"What did you hear?" demanded Martin.

"A few words of the interview with Mr. Omura of the Honjo

police station. I consider myself lucky that I didn't have the *netsuké* on my person. Otherwise I don't doubt that you would have pointed me out as the thief. I was very much tempted to come down and denounce the actual thief, but I'd given my word that I'd wait here. Are you going to accept my proposition?"

"No," said Martin. He paused to watch Forest.

Forest moistened his lips. During the pause Momonoki raised his harmonica and breathed three asthmatic chords before Martin bore down on him.

"Give me that damned thing!" Martin snatched the harmonica and dropped it into the side pocket of his white linen coat. "What are you doing here anyway? Go down to the kitchen and tell the cook to serve tiffin."

Momonoki looked inquiringly at Forest. Forest nodded.

"Yes," said Forest. "Go."

Momonoki made a quick exit.

Martin turned to Forest.

"When I said 'no,' " he began, "perhaps I should have said that we would agree to your proposition with a few slight modifications."

"Too late," said Forest curtly.

"You mean?"

"I mean I can't give you my word now. It's every man for himself—"

He did not finish his sentence. At a nod from Martin, Strange seized Forest from behind. There was a brief struggle, during which a chair was broken, Martin's nose was bloodied, and Forest received a black eye. In less than two minutes, Forest was again lying on his bed, bound hand and foot, with a gag between his teeth.

Martin produced the little box containing the stolen *netsuké* and placed it carefully in the breast pocket of the captive's coat.

"Just in case," he explained to Strange. "Come on. Let's eat some tiffin."

Momonoki was eating with the cook, a middle-aged contralto with a piece of string wound about her body to keep her long kimono sleeves from dipping into the pots. He helped her to the extent of setting a bowl of rice on the *kami-dana,* a shelf on which stood a tiny shrine dedicated to Kojin, god of the cook-stove.

He allowed himself to be fed some of the *nihon-no-shoku* the cook prepared for herself. She could never bring herself to eat the queer exotic dishes she made for the men in the next room.

Momonoki told her of his bewilderment by this, his first day in a non-Japanese household. He had had some difficulty in understanding what was going on, because the Westerners spoke too rapidly, and did not pronounce their words in the same manner as Professor Nakamura, who had taught him English in Middle School. However, he thought he

had understood the man with the crimson hairs, Forest-*san*. Forest-*san* had given him a letter, and said that when he gave the sign, Momonoki was to hurry with it to the National Arts Museum, as it was important.

A few moments later, Forest-*san* had nodded his head up and down and said: "Yes. Go." Translated, this meant: "*Ikemas'*." He supposed that this was the sign in question, and, since Forest-*san* had said the letter was important, he would hurry with it—after tiffin. What did the cook think, with her superior knowledge of foreign ways?

The cook, having scraped her chopsticks on the bottom of her rice bowl as she sucked in the last grains of *chawan-meshi* that ended the meal, smoked her *kiseru*—a thimble at the end of a pencil, containing exactly three puffs to the smoke. She thought Momonoki was probably right. She personally liked Forest-*san* the best of the three, although he had been there only a short time. He sometimes came in and tasted the things she was cooking for herself.

She was afraid, however, that he was not very bright. He was always studying in books. A person of ordinary brightness was through learning from books long before he had reached the age of Forest-*san*. Now, Martin-*san* never bothered with books. He played games with himself, with pieces of cardboard. When he did not win, he was irritable. He was apt to be irritable anyhow, and was often given to shouting. Still, his mustache was quite amusing, and all in all she liked him better than Strange-*san*.

Strange-*san* had a mouth like a carp and a voice like a sheep. He was often away at the factory where new ivories were boiled in the juice of the *yasha* tree to make them old, and Osaka brocades were smoked until they became brocades of past centuries. By this time Martin-*san* was probably playing his game with pieces of cardboard. If Momonoki cared to watch, he would find a small hole in *fusama* at the left near the bottom.

Momonoki peeked. He saw Martin nervously laying out cards in rows. He saw Strange paring an apple with infinite care to remove the peel in an unbroken ribbon.

Strange was saying: "What do you suppo-ose he meant: 'Every man for himself'?"

"Bluff," Martin replied. "What else could it mean? What could he have done all by himself? He didn't move from that room."

"What next, then?" Strange asked.

"We'll leave him as he is for the rest of the afternoon. As soon as it's dark, I'll tell him we've had a change of heart and turn

him loose. That's when you perform."

Momonoki didn't listen to any more. It didn't make sense to him. Besides, he had his errand to perform for Forest-*san*.

Martin looked up from his solitaire to see Momonoki hurrying down the hall. He arose and listened. He heard the entrance *shoji* slide open and shut. With a word to Strange, he followed.

A summer shower was converting Tokyo into a vast mud puddle. Across the street, at the end of a double row of cryptomerias, stood the rain-blurred outlines of a *torii*, gateway to a Shinto shrine.

In the distance, beyond a monotonous expanse of wet and glistening tiled roofs, could be seen a segment of the pine-fringed moat that surrounded the Emperor's palace. Fifty yards down the street was Momonoki, swinging along with the queer gait occasioned by his wet-weather *geta*—wooden clogs on stilts tall enough to keep him out of the mud. His kimono was tucked up about his thighs as a precaution against splashing.

He carried a brown oiled-paper umbrella over his shoulder, so that from the rear, only his bare legs showed below the scalloped edge—legs slightly bowed from having sat astride his mother's back as an infant—giving Martin the impression that the youth might be naked.

Martin overtook him as he was turning a corner, and hailed him in English. Momonoki turned.

"Ah. Good day," he said. He beamed, raising his yellowed panama hat. Martin seemed very cordial. Momonoki offered to share his umbrella. "Please to come undah parachute because of rain," he said.

"Thanks," said Martin. "You going far?"

"Going until Uyeno Park," Momonoki replied. "Not immoderate far."

"I'm going to Uyeno Park myself," said Martin. "Can't I do something for you?"

"I am transporting note until National Arts Museum. We say *Teikoku Hakubutsu-kwan.*"

"Give it to me. I'll take it for you," said Martin quickly.

"It is hurry-up of great momentous," said Momonoki.

"All right, all right." Martin was impatient. "Give it to me. I'll see that it's delivered."

"Aw right, aw right," echoed Momonoki, glad to be relieved of his errand by a responsible party. He handed over the envelope. "Now I am returning to house," he said.

"Never mind going back now," said Martin. "Take the afternoon off. Here's some money. Have a good time. Don't hurry back."

When Momonoki had disappeared down the street, Martin opened the envelope addressed

to the curator of the National Arts Museum. He read:

"I have located the netsuké *stolen from the museum yesterday. Circumstances will probably prevent my bringing them to you. Come to the above address immediately on receipt of this note, bringing adequate police escort.*

FRED FOREST."

Martin chuckled grimly. Strange would laugh when he showed him this. He slipped the letter into his coat pocket and returned to the house.

Strange was still seated at the table, smoking, making designs on the table cloth with his long curl of apple peeling.

"The red-head was making a rumpus," said Strange. "He tipped over the bed. I had to go-o up and bash him to keep him quiet. I think we better end the who-ole business now."

"No," said Martin. "It's got to be properly staged. You leave it to me. I've managed everything all right so far. I just caught that dumb Jap kid sneaking out with a note from Forest to the museum. It's lucky I had the brains to catch him, or this place would be overrun with fussy little Jap cops in fifteen minutes."

"Twenty minutes," Strange corrected. "It takes them five minutes to button up their uniforms."

"Anyhow, it gives me an idea," said Martin.

He went upstairs to look at the captive.

"Ready to talk business now?" he inquired.

Forest stared at him, but gave no sign of acquiesence.

Martin verified the knots and climbed back down the stairs.

The rainy afternoon dissipated into a hot, sultry evening. Martin had hung his coat on a rack in the hall and sat in his shirt sleeves, playing solitaire, while perspiration beaded his mustache and polished his Adam's apple. He was drinking port and brandy, half and half.

Strange sat across from him, as grave as a poker player trying to conceal the fact that he had filled a royal flush. He was cleaning his automatic. Forest was still bound and gagged upstairs. It was eight o'clock.

Momonoki, having been told by Martin that his presence would be required later in the evening, was in the kitchen. He had spent the afternoon — and Martin's yen — industriously amusing himself.

He had gorged himself into a slightly nauseous state with four purple bars of *kuri-no-yokan*— sweet, chestnut-studded bean paste. He had stumbled upon the first insect bazaar of the summer and had spent an hour listening to the ear-piercing chorus of a thousand cicadas, each impris-

oned in a tiny bamboo cage awaiting a buyer to appreciate its shrill song.

The cages were clustered according to price and priced according to the tone, volume, and diligence of each insect singer. The big, busy, clear-toned males were beyond Momonoki's means, but he bought a cheap one.

From the time of his purchase until he had brought it home, Momonoki's cicada had not emitted a single note. At eight o'clock he and the cook were examining the tiny cage with great concern. They wondered if the *semi-ya* had not cheated Momonoki by selling him a female cicada.

It was perhaps just as well, the cook said. Martin-*san* might object to cicadas. He was always objecting to things, without reason. For instance, he objected to such delicacies as raw carp and boiled red octopus, yet he reveled in an atrocity called *cheesu,* which was nothing less than rotten milk and stank abominably.

At this point, the cicada suddenly filled the night with a loud, strident ringing. The shrill clamor continued on a maddening monotone. Momonoki blinked with pleasure behind his thick glasses. The cook remarked that the cicada sang as well as an expensive one.

At the end of three strident minutes, the voice of Martin was raised in annoyed competition.

"Momonoki!" he bellowed.

Momonoki reluctantly left his caged singer to go into the next room.

"That a cicada in there?" Martin demanded.

"Ah. Cicada," Momonoki concurred. "In Japanese we say *semi.* Harmonious insect."

"Bring it here!" Martin ordered.

The cicada stopped singing when Momonoki placed the cage on the table in front of Martin. Martin examined it without touching it.

"Curious insect, singing with stomach," explained Momonoki. "Boy *semi* more songful than girl *semi.*"

As though to illustrate, the cicada burst into its shrill monotone.

Martin brought down his hand in a crushing blow upon the flimsy cage. The sound stopped. Martin brushed the débris to the floor.

"Throw this out!" he ordered. "And don't bring in any more."

Momonoki retreated to the kitchen, resigned to an evening without music. If only he had his bamboo flute. Or even his confiscated harmonica. He wondered if he couldn't retrieve his harmonica from Martin-*san's* coat hanging in the hall?

Martin looked at his watch. It was a little after eight. He continued his game of solitaire. He made it come out and smiled to himself as he gathered up the cards.

"It's about dark enough now," he said to Strange. "In twenty minutes you can go out and stand in the shadow of the trees across the street. At nine o'clock our friend upstairs will come out, bound for the museum. He'll be in a hurry. His light tropical worsted coat ought to make a perfect target for you. He'll—"

Martin stopped abruptly and stood up. There was a rattling and banging noise outside the house. Martin laughed nervously and sat down again. He recognized the noise as the cook putting up the wooden shutters to cover the paper screens. The house would be hotter than ever, but police regulations required the shutters at night. When the last one was in place, the night grew heavy with the queer, thick silence of a Japanese city, a silence accentuated by isolated sounds: The faint, falsetto cry of a distant *soba* vendor; the hollow, wooden knocking of the night watchman, reassuring the populace of his vigilance for fires.

"I'm going to write a chit to the police," Martin resumed, "accusing Forest and asking for help against a desperate man. I'll send the Jap kid with the chit just before nine o'clock. The cops will get here just after you've done your work. My chit will explain everything and put us in the clear."

"I'll do a neat job," said Strange, grinning. He munched an apple until Martin looked at his watch again and said: "You'd better go now."

Strange arose, patted his hip pocket, and lumbered out. As he stepped into the hall, he collided with a silent, swift-moving body. He grappled a second before the man he was choking could gasp: "I am Momonoki."

Strange dragged him into the light. Momonoki was bareheaded and out of breath, as though he had been running.

"Where you been?" Strange demanded suspiciously.

"Ah. Where?" panted Momonoki. "In next street made purchasing of trifling cigarette."

Strange prompted Momonoki toward the kitchen with the toe of his heavy shoe. Then he bowed to Martin and said: "Any time, now." He went out.

Martin climbed the stairs and removed the gag from between Forest's teeth.

"I apologize, boy," said Martin. "You're right, and I've come around to your way of thinking. Strange is going to take the blame and he's leaving the country. You and I will stay here and run this business on the level. I'll cut you loose and you can take the *netsuké* over to the museum.

"They won't be after it, because I intercepted that note you tried to send by Momonoki. There's only one condition. I promised Strange you wouldn't do anything until nine o'clock.

He's gone down to Yokohama and his boat sails at nine."

"What time is it now?"

"Ten minutes to nine."

"Cut me loose," said Forest. "I'll wait ten minutes."

Martin freed him. He got up stiffly. His first move was to take out the small box Martin had put into his pocket. He opened it to make sure the *netsuké* still nestled in the cotton. His eyes shone with exaltation.

Martin returned to the ground floor. He sat at the table, took pencil and paper and began to indite his note to the police, the note that would accuse a dead man. He smiled as he heard Forest moving about upstairs.

Suddenly he stopped writing. He looked up, listening. Some one was playing the harmonica in the kitchen, wheezy chords which sounded vaguely like "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." The exact import of the harmonica music did not at once occur to Martin, but the tinny strains produced in his subconscious a dim sense of foreboding that grew as he listened. He stood up. He took a step toward the kitchen, then paused.

The harmonica music had stopped, but there was still sound in his ears — a far, frantic squawking, as though horns were being blown on many autos. The sound grew louder.

Thoughts clicked like cogs in Martin's mind. The meaning of the harmonica music flashed upon him. He went quickly to the hall and thrust his hands into the pockets of his linen coat that hung there. He swore.

He heard Forest at the top of the stairs. He heard the squawking of horns. He heard Momonoki playing the harmonica. Damn that Jap kid! The whole scheme was askew now. He knew what those squawking horns meant. He would rush over to warn Strange.

Martin hurried out the door in his shirt sleeves, across the two by four garden, out the high wooden gate. His white shirt gleamed in the darkness of the street. He ran toward the lane of cryptomerias where Strange was waiting.

Flame flared twice in the shadow of the cryptomerias. A double explosion burst on the night and echoed from the roofs like distant thunder.

Martin coughed, stumbled. He got up, shouting something inarticulate. He fell on his face in the muddy street.

Strange emerged from behind the trees, his automatic still in his hand. He tossed a second gun to the ground beside the figure that lay still at his feet. He looked up as two motor cars drove into the street and stopped. Policemen in white duck uniforms swarmed from the cars.

"Here he is, gents," said Strange to the first policemen to

reach him. "This is the bird who stole your—"

He stopped. With his foot he had turned over the man who lay in the mud. His jaw dropped as he peered into Martin's face.

More motor cars were arriving. Policemen were jabbering to Strange in Japanese. He shook his head, bewildered, muttering. He was disarmed without a struggle. A policeman was tying his hands behind his back with a piece of cord.

Forest was pushing his way through the crowd that now blocked the narrow street. A distinguished looking elderly Japanese wearing a silk *haori* cloak got out of a motor car to grasp Forest's arm.

"Netsuké motte kimasuka?" he demanded of Forest.

Forest pressed a small box into the old man's hand. "I was on my way to bring them to you," he said.

The old man embraced him.

In the kitchen of the house, Momonoki was engrossed in his rendition of "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" on his recovered harmonica. At the first pause the cook ventured to inquire what had taken Momonoki so inordinately long to retrieve his harmonica from the pocket of Martin-*san's* coat, which, after all, hung only a few steps away in the hall. She had fallen asleep waiting for him to return.

Momonoki explained that while seeking his instrument, he had come across a note which Forest-*san* had given him to deliver that afternoon and which he in turn had entrusted to Martin-*san*. Martin-*san* had apparently forgotten to deliver it, and inasmuch as Forest-*san* had said the note was important, there was nothing for Momonoki to do but make belated delivery as quickly as possible. He had run both ways.

"I am sorry for your sake for this miserable delay," he said.

"Make no further mention," said the cook. "Please continue with your glorious music."

Momonoki had blown the first chords of "Home Sweet Home" before he became aware of the fact that the house was full of policemen.

peaceful in the country

by . . . Thomas Walsh

It was just a dreamy little town with a one-room police department. How could it give a bright city cop pointers on law-enforcement?

SUPPER was fine. Supper was fried chicken and sliced country ham, crushed corn and asparagus, hashed brown potatoes, lettuce with sweet dressing, home-made relish, cold beets, and four kinds of preserves. After dessert was cleared off—just a few pieces of blueberry and lemon sponge pies, Aunt Bertha's own apricots and peaches, a pitcher of thick cream, and a plate of cookies—they all went out to the porch.

Tony Kilpatrick and his wife, Caroline, sat on the swing. They didn't contribute much to the conversation. They just sat and listened to Caroline's Aunt Bertha and Cousin Henry Stearns. Kilpatrick didn't mind at all, because he discovered that in many ways the porch was a very instructive place.

When people walked by, or down Elm Avenue from the square, Aunt Bertha and Cousin Henry Stearns commented upon them sharply, in a few rapid-fire sentences that were as much to the point as telegrams. They seemed to know everybody in North Carmel by both past per-

Lester William MacHarg, Thomas Walsh can't say no to the plea of his enthusiastic readers for more and ever more of his famous police yarns. The inexhaustible fount of his creativeness never shows the slightest sign of running dry. On the contrary, each of his stories seems to excel the last. You'll like this suspense-ful and amusing Kilpatrick yarn, with its small town turnabout smash climax, by a frequent contributor to an unusual number of "slick paper" publications.

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formances and present-day debits and credits; and Kilpatrick told himself that if there had been a stage, a strong light and a detective sergeant to ask the proper questions, he might also have imagined himself back at police headquarters in New York, attending a morning line-up.

All in all, it was an uneventful evening but an enormously entertaining one. At half past nine, when Aunt Bertha went to bed and Cousin Henry Stearns took himself off to his third-floor bachelor quarters, Caroline stirred gently in the swing, and sighed comfortably.

"Of course," she said, in such a casual tone that Kilpatrick realized at once that he shouldn't agree too readily with her, "North Carmel is quiet—awfully quiet. No excitement, no morning papers, at half past eight in the evenings, no bright lights, no crowds—no nothing, really. I suppose everything rather bores you."

"Bores who?" Kilpatrick murmured craftily, kissing the hollow under her left ear. "I don't think it's been boring at all. Restful, perhaps—pretty nice and relaxing in its way. But—"

"Now you're being very gracious," Caroline said dreamily. "Or what you think is very gracious. But don't imagine that in the four or five hours you've been here you've learned everything there is to learn about North Carmel. See that rhododendron bush over here? When I was fifteen I let a boy named Sam Engelhardt kiss me in back of it one night. And I'll tell you something else you'd never suspect, Tony Kilpatrick. It was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to anyone anywhere."

"That's a fine admission to make," Kilpatrick said, drawing off far enough to scowl at her. "That's something to brag about."

"Isn't it, though?" Caroline asked, very complacent about it. Fireflies flickered low against the hedge Cousin Henry Stearns had been clipping that afternoon. Pale small stars glittered above them, between leafy branches, in the dark sky. "I think you sound pretty smug and self-righteous. Nobody ever kissed *you,* I suppose."

"Not at fifteen," Kilpatrick declared virtuously. "In those days I lived an upright and honorable existence. But if someone had, I wouldn't go around boasting about it now. That isn't quite the thing to do, in my opinion. That smacks of—"

"Oh, hush up," Caroline told him, laughing. "Now I suppose I'll never hear the last of Sam Engelhardt."

They swung pleasantly back and forth in the shadows. It was very nice.

"Swell," Kilpatrick announced presently. "As yet," he added, "I

have no idea what the Stearns family thinks of me. But if they approve of Caroline's man half as much as Caroline's man approves of them—"

"Well," Caroline said, looking around in that attractive and considering way she had, "you weren't too much amused by anything, and that's always a help. Keep that up and you'll get along very nicely down here. The one thing you'll have to remember is that North Carmel isn't New York, and that it doesn't have any great desire to be. A small matter, Tony Kilpatrick, but an important one."

"Love her," Kilpatrick murmured tenderly, "love her town."

They began to swing again, holding hands. At that moment, well-fed and happy, he had nothing but the very best of intentions . . .

In the morning, however, after he walked two blocks down Elm Avenue to the North Carmel Town Hall, and found the executive branch of the North Carmel Police Department—all of it—in a small room behind the office of the county clerk, those good intentions wavered considerably.

The executive branch was a heavy-faced man wearing fireman's suspenders, with his shirt sleeves rolled up over long woolen underwear, with his feet on a desk drawer, and a copy of the North Carmel *Weekly Republican* on his knees. His tie and his gold-braided cap hung on a wall hook in back of him. He wore a striped, neckband-style shirt—no collar—with a celluloid button at the throat. He also wore high-laced shoes and white cotton socks.

Kilpatrick, one of Inspector Carmody's up-and-coming young men, took off his hat, forced a smile, and introduced himself. But from there on, unfortunately, even Kilpatrick found it impossible to achieve any kind of cordiality. The chief examined his person and his credentials with a naive but rather dry sort of curiosity.

"That must have been you sitting on the porch at Miss Bertha Stearns' place on Elm Avenue last night," he said. "Saw you there, on my way downtown after supper. I didn't know then, of course, that you'd turn out to be police."

Kilpatrick smiled again, patiently, and explained that Miss Bertha Stearns' niece Caroline had been Mrs. Kilpatrick for some time now. Two months, in fact. Because she was, because she came from this town and some of her folks still lived here, it had been decided back at headquarters a couple of days ago that perhaps plain-clothesman Kilpatrick could appear in North Carmel as a young fellow meeting his in-laws for the first time, and not as a New York police officer down here on important business con-

cerning one Casper Claude Brimmer.

"Chekky Brimmer?" the chief said. He had a deep voice, a slow way of using it, and owlish brown eyes that made him look stupid. "Bad stock, mister. What's he up to these days?"

"Back in New York," Kilpatrick said, "we identified this Brimmer after a loft robbery—through his Rogues' Gallery portrait. His record tells us that he was born and raised in North Carmel, and Inspector Carmody thinks there might be a small chance of his coming back here. He has money now; he'd want to avoid New York for a while. Inspector Carmody thinks that Brimmer wouldn't mind swanking it around for a bit in a place where no one ever thought very much of him. The inspector figures—"

"Inspector Carmody?" the chief said, as if he wanted to get that straight. The tone might be sarcastic, and might not.

"What we hope," Kilpatrick said curtly, "is that I'll be able to pick up some information down here as to Brimmer's present whereabouts. Perhaps that can be done through friends or relatives in town who hear occasionally from him. Any small fact, any hint, may prove significant. If there happens to be a good local man available who's had some experience in that line, and could nose around in the proper circles without being too obvious about it—"

The chief leaned forward and used the cuspidor. Then he said, "Got four men here, mister. No inspectors, though. Mebbe one of them will turn up something for you. Mebbe not. You want to tell me exactly how you'd like everything done?"

Kilpatrick who was not conscious of having been superior or patronizing, despite the way things seemed to be handled here, tightened his lips and said that he supposed they knew their job. The chief said he'd always thought they did. Thought so still, for that matter. Mr. Kilpatrick could drop around in a couple of days and see.

"The end of the week?" Kilpatrick said, with a sour smile.

No notes were taken, no penetrating questions were asked, no wheels within wheels were set in motion. Back in Elm Avenue, he told Caroline contemptuously that she could never imagine a department like it. Flies everywhere. One old wooden desk. One battered filing cabinet. And a fat, stupid-looking chief who—

"Now wait a minute," Caroline said, "I hope you didn't go down there looking for a fingerprint division, and a photographer's darkroom, and a homicide squad. Listen, Tony. You don't understand what a small town is like because you've never been in one before. Chief John-

son does, because he's never lived anywhere else. I'd advise you, to let him handle it. You might be surprised." She smoothed his coat lapel down absently. "And speaking of surprises—"

Kilpatrick curled his lip. He said that he'd be surprised, all right, if anyone like that chief, who couldn't hold down a park job in New York, turned up as much as a backward eight-year-old boy might find out. Clowns like him—

"Oh, shut up," Caroline said, her face suddenly dark. "What do you want him to do, just because you're from Centre Street? Of course he resented you. Why shouldn't he? I can just see how you stalked in there with that supercilious look on your face, blabbing about that Inspector Carmody of yours as if no one else knew the least thing about police work! Inspector Carmody this, and Inspector Carmody that! Maybe you should have married him."

Kilpatrick blinked at her. What was she getting hot about? All he wanted to show her was that if they had to handle a job like this in New York—

"In New York, in New York, in New York!" Caroline said. "I suppose that dirty town and that wonderful Inspector Carmody are the only things that matter a bit to you. They're just about all I've heard since we got here yesterday. Well, let me tell you that I'm getting pretty sick of them. You go out this morning and everyone you see is a quaint rural character. That's just too bad. Maybe you better change that attitude and change it right now. I've had about all of it I can take."

She went inside, slamming the door after her. Kilpatrick brooded alone on the porch until lunchtime. Later, there was a strained afternoon, and a strained evening. They sat on the porch again, with Aunt Bertha and Cousin Henry Stearns, because no one suggested doing anything else; and then at nine-thirty Kilpatrick walked downtown with Cousin Henry Stearns for some ice cream.

On the way home, out of boredom and desperation—and without hoping that anything valuable would develop from it—he mentioned to Cousin Henry Stearns, that once, in a New York boarding house, he had lived next door to a fellow from here—someone called Chalky or Chekky Brimmer.

Cousin Henry Stearns, a sharp-nosed little man, looked up at Kilpatrick, pursed his lips, and turned out to be a gold mine.

"Know him," Cousin Henry Stearns said, shaking his head. "Oh, my! Lowdown, sneakin' sort of fella. Always up to some trick or other. Always chasin' around after women."

Before they got back to Elm Avenue an attentive but almost

incredible Kilpatrick learned about the last time Chekky Brimmer had been in town, eight months ago. He learned, too, about the girl Chekky had then, who still worked as a waitress in the Little Beaver Cafe on South Main, and about the new clothes and the diamond ring she had begun to sport last week-end, about the time Chekky Brimmer would have cut in for his share on the loft job.

Everything began to shape up nicely. Much heartened, even jovial again with Caroline, Kilpatrick pretended that he was out of cigarettes, as soon as the ice cream was finished, and started off on a stroll that took him eventually into the Little Beaver Cafe.

There was only one waitress. She was plump, had bright eyes and dimples, a lithe way of moving, and a very good-looking diamond-and-platinum ring. A slow town, she admitted, after Kilpatrick had stared her up and down insolently. He asked what there was to do around here at night. She couldn't suggest anything. The way she left him at once, with a slightly bored expression that permitted itself to be slightly bored, showed that she didn't much care, either.

Kilpatrick ordered another couple of drinks, and handed out two fifty-cent tips, but they did not seem to get him anywhere in particular. At eleven-thirty, considerably piqued because he had not anticipated a rebuff of that kind in a place like the Little Beaver Cafe, he went home and found Caroline asleep, or pretending to be asleep. He didn't get so much as a "good night" out of her, and of course he didn't give one, either.

In the morning, he got up early to avoid Caroline at breakfast. In the afternoon, he accompanied Cousin Henry Stearns downtown on a business trip. In the evening, when Caroline continued to treat him like a worm, he walked out through the back door and down to the Little Beaver Cafe, in a dangerously sullen mood.

This time he did not leave any tips around, or make any overtures. It seemed to be a vast improvement in method. He had his table wiped off—it hadn't been touched last night—and his drink mixed for him.

"What's wrong?" he demanded sarcastically. "Has someone around here decided to start treating a paying customer like an ordinary human being?"

The barmaid seemed to think that was pretty cute. She laughed, sat down across from him, and took one of his cigarettes. She began to call him Curly and Big Boy. In what he considered to be the best movie tradition, Kilpatrick called her Sweetheart as if it were her first name, not a term of endearment.

He remained gruff, since that seemed to be the attitude called for—gruff and cautious.

Not until twenty minutes later, after he had had two more drinks and told her that he sold food supplies out of Philadelphia, did he admire the diamond-and-platinum ring. That seemed to please her. She held it across the table so that he could get a better look at it.

"Nice job," Kilpatrick told her, squeezing her hand just a little. "It looks like three or four hundred dollars to me. Who donated? The regular boy friend?"

She blew smoke at him kittenishly. Who wanted to know?

"Little Curly," Kilpatrick said, tough but playful about it. "I've been out on the road a long time, sweetheart. I like company so long as trouble doesn't come along with it. If the boy friend isn't around, maybe we can step out some night and have a little fun for ourselves. If he is, I'm marking myself off the list. I scare easy."

"I wouldn't say you looked it," the barmaid told him.

"Okay," Kilpatrick said, not releasing her hand at once. "Is he or isn't he? You're the doctor, sweetheart."

"Harrisburg far enough?" she said.

"Harrisburg's fine," Kilpatrick said. He managed to keep everything out of his voice that he wanted to keep out of it. "What's the Joe do? Work up there?"

"That's very likely," she said. She looked down at the ring, pouting. "That man does the dumbest things, Curly. When I don't see him for months and months he can't come straight back here—oh, no! He's got to stop in Harrisburg."

"Nice town," Kilpatrick said. "I hit it three times a year. Good hotels."

He could understand why Brimmer would stop in Harrisburg, in order to make a careful reconnaissance of the home grounds before appearing in them in person. Well, he said, Harrisburg seemed safe enough. If she could call up the boy friend's hotel there, so he wouldn't try to call her back here later, she and Kilpatrick might hit that roadhouse outside of town. Not much past eleven now.

"Wish I could call him," the barmaid said. Her eyes glittered. "Sometimes he gets me so mad! But I didn't say he was in Harrisburg yet. He'll get there tonight on the twelve-thirty train."

"Then what are we worried about?" Kilpatrick said. He made a casual show of inspecting his wrist watch. "Suppose I get the car and stop back here in half an hour?"

The barmaid got up and patted his hair. "Little Curly," she said. "Make it twenty minutes."

"Make it fifteen, sweetheart,"

Kilpatrick said. He had everything he needed now. He turned in the doorway, very well satisfied with himself, and the barmaid smiled and waved coyly at him. He flicked a forefinger at her.

Two or three minutes later, he bounced smugly up the Elm Avenue steps, and saw Caroline waiting for him on the porch.

"Just where have you been?" Caroline asked quietly.

She seemed all prepared for something or other. Her arms were folded, and one toe tapped jerkily, as if she were unconscious of it, against the floor.

"Downtown," Kilpatrick said. "I'm in a rush, baby. Don't hold me up now."

He started for the front door.

"I'll hold you up," Caroline said shakily. Her eyes looked blurred. "I just waited out here for one thing, Tony Kilpatrick: to tell you that if you have any idea, even the faintest idea, that you can humiliate me by running off night after night like this—"

Kilpatrick twisted his wrist watch up against the living-room light. Twenty-five to twelve. He muttered something, started inside, stopped, remembered that this was the first time Caroline had spoken to him in two days, and whirled frenziedly on her. He'd talk to her in the morning, he said. There were a few remarks he wouldn't mind making then. Now he just wanted to ask what gave her the idea she could set that Dutch jaw at him whenever she wanted to. He could tell her who had started all this; who had treated him like a dog, and worse than a dog, just because—

"Watch your tongue," Caroline said. Her contempt was superb. "You're being almost funny."

"What do you think you are?" Kilpatrick demanded breathlessly.

"Anything but mean and petty and unreasonable and stupid." She smiled coolly to herself—a smile that infuriated him—and he came back, stood over the swing, and practically bawled at her the whole story of the barmaid and the 12:30 Harrisburg train.

"That's what I've been doing last night and tonight too—getting everything settled because your local Komedy Kops can't be trusted with it. I'm not so smart, maybe. But I've found out everything I wanted to find out. I—"

"Do you think so?" Caroline said. She looked up directly and scornfully at him. "You know what I wonder? I wonder why she wants to get you up to Harrisburg tonight. Here's something you ought to know, Tony Kilpatrick. Every time you turn on that masculine charm of yours you do it so obviously, and with such typical conceit, that you couldn't take in an average high-school girl. Have you any serious

idea that you fooled her for half a second?"

Kilpatrick froze in the doorway. "All right," he said thickly. Things had begun to hum in his head: it was almost a quarter to twelve now. "What did that last crack mean?"

"Oh, dear," Caroline said. Now she appeared genuinely distressed. "Here I am getting you all worried with those stupid and provincial ideas of mine. I suppose it's nothing but the fantastic notion that when you went down there and began to shine up to her with that big-city superiority of yours, she must have wondered about you. You couldn't stay here where you belonged—naturally! You had to do everything on your own hook.

"You never bothered to remember that practically everybody in town heard that I married a New York policeman this spring. In a town like this, she could have found out who you were and what you were up to in half an hour, if she wanted to. I think she wanted to. Hadn't you thought of that?"

Kilpatrick wet his lips. "Sure. But—"

"But," Caroline said, smiling brightly out at the rhododendron bush where Sam Engelhardt had kissed her, "isn't everything else perfectly obvious? She snubbed you last night when she didn't know who you were. She fell all over you tonight, when she did. I'd suspect that there was some reason for it besides your masculine fascination. The train that stops at Harrisburg at twelve-thirty gets to the junction over here at midnight.

"Suppose he's on that, so that she couldn't get in touch with you after she found out about you? Wouldn't she do exactly what she's doing—get you up to Harrisburg on some fool's errand, so that she can warn him and get him out of town before you're back again?"

Kilpatrick stared down at her just long enough to race through mentally all the successive stages of that argument. A moment later, seeing the barmaid and the Harrisburg story in a blindingly different light, he ran in and snatched Cousin Henry Stearns' car keys from the mantel. It was eleven-fifty-one when the four-cylinder job roared past the Town Hall corner. It was eleven-fifty-nine—ages later—before the junction lights appeared in front of him.

Just beyond the highway turnoff, he got out of the car and sprinted up the rest of the way to the platform. The barmaid was standing off by herself, at the darkest end. A small coupe—hers, probably—stood with its lights dimmed and its motor idling on the gravel driveway in back of her.

Making a wide detour around the lighted area, Kilpatrick cir-

cled in again, breathless but triumphant, on the other side of the coupe. He was just in time. A metallic humming began way off, deepened, and was replaced by the sudden melancholy hoarseness of a train whistle. Delicate light shimmered across the rails. A man with an eyeshade in his hand walked out of the ticket office. The barmaid threw away her cigarette, glanced back at the coupe, and pulled nervously at the collar of her coat.

Four or five Pullmans rolled by. The barmaid ran along after them. Half a minute later she came back past the ticket office holding Caspar Claude Brimmer's arm against her, and talking anxiously up at him. They paused under a light. Then they came on again toward the coupe, and Kilpatrick crouched down behind it. She got in first.

As soon as she did, Kilpatrick, timing everything with the utmost care, moved around fast and caught Caspar Claude Brimmer as he was preparing to follow her. There wasn't anything much to that part, because Brimmer stiffened up the moment he felt Kilpatrick's gun against his ribs.

"That's the stuff," Kilpatrick said, out of one side of his mouth. "Watch it, Caspar. Watch the hands, now." He risked one quick glance at the barmaid, jerking his head at her. "Outside," he said.

In the next instant, two things happened simultaneously. He grasped the inside door lever with his left hand to hold it open, and the barmaid, either through fright or a really brilliant improvisation slammed the car forward in low gear.

It jerked ahead four or five feet; then it stalled. But in that distance Kilpatrick was yanked after it like the tail on a kite. The string of lights over the platform, the ticket office, Caspar Claude Brimmer, all swung around and back at him in an unrealistic circle. He went down. Brimmer ran off into the woods. Kilpatrick fired, missed, had no chance to fire again, rolled over, got up, and dashed madly around the coupe and after Brimmer.

Five seconds later, just when he was beginning to pick up speed, a fence rail caught him in the pit of the stomach. He plunged over it head first, rolled down a slope, and lost his hat. He couldn't see anything. All at once the darkness had become impenetrable. He got up wheezing, stopped, listened, trying frantically to catch some sound, some movement; and then ran on again in what he presumed to be the direction of the state highway.

Bushes tore at him. An animal squealed and thrashed around on his left. He ran that way, thinking that Brimmer had disturbed it. The thrashing stopped. A tree slammed into him. He staggered,

caught at it, and ran around it into a bigger one.

This time he went down, collapsed, and stayed down for thirty or forty seconds. Streaks of colored light swam ahead of him. He could smell grass and hear small night rustlings. He was trying to suck air into his chest. Then a car whined up and stopped somewhere nearby. The barmaid, he thought. He began to run ahead, gasping, furious.

The darkness thinned out. Vague over-all details assumed shape. A few stars, a hill over there, another tree, a shape racing around it— He fired twice at that, and then ran on after it with his lips drawn far back into his cheeks. His second wind came to him. He began to feel savagely exultant, as if he were running with no effort at all, on foam rubber that automatically snapped his legs back under him.

It was not important that he had no chance to fire again. He could wait. He was sure now that he could run all night if he had to—longer than Brimmer, longer than anybody. Fresh night air slapped at him. A fence appeared on his left, and he followed it over a low hill and past a line of trees.

Something moved up ahead. He saw it, almost fired at it, and then dropped himself flat on the ground. He brushed the hair out of his eyes. *Got him now,* he thought savagely. *He's trapped up there between the fence and the trees.* A car honked and honked. *Go on, sweetheart,* he told himself grimly. *Maybe he doesn't hear you. Or maybe he thinks that if he just lies quiet now . . .*

Kilpatrick inched forward. The car honked again insistently. Someone shouted in back of him in the meadow. He crawled a few yards, reached the trees, and saw something dark and motionless behind the trees, waiting. *Ten feet or so,* Kilpatrick thought. *One quick rush and everything's over.*

He crouched, wiped his coat sleeve across his mouth, and made the rush. "Brimmer!" he shouted in the middle of it. An enormous shape, much larger than Brimmer, half-seen, terrifying, bore straight down on him. He blazed away at it with both hands clasping the gun to steady it.

Apparently he missed. It reared up over him, whinnying, hooves beating the air, and raced past. He fell backward. For quite a long time his heart pounded so fast inside him that he could neither breathe nor move.

It was the first time in his life that he had ever been importantly frightened. He heard the shouts again, but he had no idea what to do about them, because he did not know where Brimmer was, where the road was, where *he* was. Eventually, he realized that

the yells were for him. *All right, all right,* he thought.

All the exultation was gone out of him. His stomach hurt. His chest hurt. His right shoulder hurt. The horse was still plunging around him in a circle. He was still frightened. Probably what he felt like least in the world at that moment was one of Inspector Carmody's resourceful and self-assured young men.

At last, by placing the junction lights behind him, he located the highway. When he stepped onto the concrete, he could see Brimmer, the barmaid, the fat chief of the North Carmel Police Department, and a pair of headlights. The fat chief was bellowing Kilpatrick's name, over, and over.

"Okay, okay," Kilpatrick mumbled, so low that he could not have been heard five feet off. He dusted ineffectually at his knees, smoothed his coat, pulled his tie straight, and walked toward them. Of course, the first thing they wanted to know was what he had been shooting at down there.

When he got home, Caroline studied him, said, "Well," in a remarkably tactful manner, and led him back into the kitchen. There instead of exclaiming at his appearance under lights, and asking him to look at himself and his suit, she made some sort of concerned sound with her lips and got busy with a washcloth and hot water.

She had called the chief, she admitted at last, not because she imagined Tony was going to need any help at the junction, but because it had seemed to her that they might as well make sure it went off all right. It had, hadn't it?"

"Fine," Kilpatrick said hoarsely. It was the first word he had spoken since he came in. "Haven't you heard? The North Carmel boys got there just in time to pick up Brimmer and Brimmer's girl on the state highway. I spent my time chasing a horse around the meadow, taking pot shots at it, and missing by a wide margin."

"Oh," Caroline said, and stopped there. Kilpatrick looked up wretchedly at her.

"That's it," he said. "That's the story they're going to be talking about here for the next ten years. Kilpatrick and the horse. The funniest thing that ever happened in North Carmel."

"I think they've got their nerve," Caroline said. "But what do you care about them, Tony? She put her arms around him, in an even nicer way than usual. She kissed him between his chin and his lower lip, and made various small but consoling sounds.

"You've got Mamma," she said softly. "And Mamma doesn't care. Mamma loves you."

"My girl," Kilpatrick said, a little absently.

She sighed. She looked around at him, put out the light; and Kilpatrick got up and followed

her out of the kitchen, muttering to himself.

"So they had a big time," he said on the way through the dining room. "So okay. So let them come to New York sometime. They'd still find out more from a cop like Carmody in half an hour—"

Caroline put out the dining-room light. He followed her once more. He didn't quite know how or why she was back on his side again after all the illogical difficulties they had. But if Mamma still loved him, he had managed to salvage a little out of this mess. Mamma mattered a good deal, he discovered suddenly. Mamma—

"Hey!" he said, not very loudly, as if he'd just become aware of something. "Come back here. What was that look in the kitchen for? What's this Mamma business?"

Caroline did not come back, but she stopped on the third step. Her eyes shone darkly and nicely, not all for him.

"Mr. Sherlock," Caroline said, "What do you think?"

In the current issue of THE SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *now on sale, one of the really great names in mystery fiction ventures boldly into a realm forbidden to all but the most audacious—that of* hauntingness *in a high C dimension of terror and suspense. The story is called* PINK FLUFF *and it's by—hold your breath—*Craig Rice, *no less. For a haunted house treat that's new and different and made wholly magical by fantasy's enchanted wand we urge that you hasten, by car or on foot, to your nearest newsdealer.*

a bit of wire-pulling

by . . . E. C. R. Lorac

As crisp and startling as frost crystals on a bullet-riddled windowpane was Inspector Lang's remembrance of a wintertime murder.

"IT'S A VERY rare thing for a murder to be committed actually in the presence of a police officer," said Inspector Lang, the old C.I.C. man.

"I should say it was unique," growled Dr. Walton, and Harland—a rising young barrister—put in persuasively:

"Tell us about it, Inspector. We're a safe audience, and it's just the night for a thumping, paradoxical crime yarn."

The three men were chance guests at an inn in the Lake District. It was Easter-time, but the weather had turned disagreeable on them, a shrill northeaster having brought snow and called a halt to rock climbing and walking. That evening, sitting over a grand log fire, the three men had disclosed their callings and were soon deep in a mutual exchange of confidences.

Inspector Lang stretched out his long legs to the fire. "It was quite a story," he said, "and it happened on just such a dirty night as this one. You may remember hearing of Sir Charles Leighton—one of the wealthiest

There are picayune and impossible elements in even the most carelessly planned murder which are almost certain to lead the Law astray. How much more baffling, then, must a crime of violence be when it is accomplished with diabolical cunning in the actual presence of the Law. Here is an excitingly different, wayward murder indeed, by a gifted English writer.

industrialists in the north. It all began when Leighton came to the Chief Constable complaining that he was receiving threatening letters. Not surprising, perhaps, because he'd been a harsh old devil in his time.

"We couldn't trace the writer, and when our failure became apparent Leighton demanded police protection. 'Look here,' he said, 'this last letter tells me an attempt will be made on my life before the old year's out. Today's December the thirtieth. Now I haven't given the police much trouble during my life. The least you can do is give me police protection until New Year's Day—and if I'm beaten up and perhaps killed by some agitator I've discharged it's up to you to catch him.'

"The Chief Constable said Leighton was a man of some importance and we'd be well advised to oblige him. And that's how I went with Sir Charles to a bridge party at his son-in-law's on New Year's Eve. Not that I play bridge—but that didn't matter. I drove with him to Harrowby Manor, and quite an evening I had of it. No one but Sir Charles knew I was a C.I.D. man, of course.

"Sir Charles had only one surviving child, Annabell," went on the inspector. "She was married to John Bland. He was a financier—a clever chap always able to foretell the markets—or so it was said. A lovely house it was, and the young couple—John and Annabell Bland—welcomed us very graciously.

"Of course, they made a great fuss over Sir Charles, and they accepted me as one of his friends and treated me accordingly. There were six of us all together—John and Annabell Bland, Sir Charles, a young R.A.F. officer, a pretty young lady named Avril Walsh and yours truly. It was decided that Bland should sit out the first rubber and he started chatting with me in friendly fashion, while the other four settled down at the bridge table.

"I sat by the fire, and the bridge table was in the middle of the room. Bland was an attentive son-in-law, and he and his wife made a determined effort to see that Sir Charles was comfortable. He was a big, heavy chap, and they gave him a very fine chair—a Jacobean piece it was—strong and heavy enough to take any man's weight. They got settled at last and Sir Charles was in the best of spirits—he'd bid a slam and was keen to make it. John Bland and I talked quietly so as not to interrupt the game. I said I thought the snow had stopped falling and Bland replied: 'I think you're wrong. It's heavier than ever,' and he went to the French window and pulled the curtain back to peer out.

"The room faced east and the

window was pretty well snowed up—just as this one is now—and as Bland peered out he gave a sudden yell: 'Good Lord! There's a man out there on the verandah! He's moving toward— Look out, everybody! He's got a gun . . .' I jumped up, but the shot came hard on Bland's words. The glass tinkled down as the bullet came through and Leighton dropped dead over the table, shot through the head."

"A pretty kettle of fish for you, Inspector," grunted Dr. Walton, "with you there on duty to protect Leighton. But did you get the assailant?"

"Yes," said Lang. "I got him —eventually. There was a moment of wild confusion after the shot. Bland tried to get the French window open, and to rush outside to grapple with the gunman. But I wouldn't have that. I wasn't risking any amateur interference. I'd posted young Sergeant Dixon outside, and I knew he was a good lad.

"I tackled Bland and pulled him away from the window, though he was white with rage, and difficult to control. I told them I was a C.I.D. officer and ordered them all to stay where they were. They were all raging at me. The shot had come through the window and Bland had seen the gunman jump for cover in the shrubbery. Why had I prevented Bland from going after him?"

"Well, I guess I'd have felt the same in similar circumstances," put in Harland. But the old inspector shook his head.

"I may be a bit old and slow, lad. But I wasn't going to have the pack of them tramping outside there in the snow, and mucking everything up. Young Dixon reported quickly enough. He'd been on duty at the angle of the house and his attention had been distracted just before the gunshot. But he'd swung round pretty fast when he heard the report. Bland just swore at him. 'Fast! Damn you, you weren't fast enough! I tell you I *saw* the man jump for the shrubbery. You police officers make me tired. If the inspector hadn't interfered I'd have got the devil.'

Dixon had found the gun though. It was an old-type army pistol, not an automatic, and it had been dropped in the snow on the path at the edge of the verandah. There were also some big footprints out there in the snow, leading to the shrubbery. By this time a local constable had turned up, and I left him on duty with the party. I wasn't letting one of them move until I'd had time to think."

"I can believe that bridge party didn't think very highly of you at that moment," said Dr. Walton, as the inspector paused in his narrative.

"I'm quite sure they didn't," agreed Lang. "But a little think-

ing's worth a deal of rushing about, sometimes. And I was puzzled. I went outside to have a look. The footprints in the snow were plain enough. A man *had* stood on the verandah and *had* jumped for the shrubbery, though I could see that the thaw had set in and the prints were losing shape.

"Then I found a rather odd item—a short length of spiral curtain wire, the expanding sort. It was hanging on a branch in the shrubbery, opposite the French window. It might have been irrelevant—or just the opposite. I then studied the window and curtain fittings. My struggle with Bland had half torn the blind away and the cord had come adrift. But I saw that the telephone wire entered the house through a hole bored in the window-framing."

Lang paused and then added: "That was about the last, but I'll just repeat the essential points. Sir Charles was sitting at the bridge table in the center of the room when he was shot—sitting in direct line with the window. The shot came *through* the glass. There were footprints outside the window and on the verandah, and I'd found a length of expanding curtain wire, hanging on a branch across the path. An hour or so earlier it had been freezing hard, but now the thaw had set in, and I knew I'd have to think this thing out before the thaw altered the conditions. Any of you lads like to have a try at sorting it out?"

Harland spoke first. "Obviously Bland planned a quick way of getting Leighton's fortune—Bland's wife being Leighton's only child. Bland bribed a gunman to shoot Leighton when the curtain was drawn back. And the hired killer got into cover in the shrubbery so fast that Dixon didn't even see him jump."

"That won't do," said Dr. Walton. "You haven't listened to the evidence. Lang said the window was *snowed over*—precisely as that window is, over there. In addition, the window would have been *misted over* inside, as the room was very warm. How could the gunman see through the window clearly enough to aim? If you have any doubt on that score, go outside here, and try it. The thing's impossible."

Inspector Lang chuckled. "You are right, of course. In addition to that, how did Bland *see* the man on the verandah when the window was snowed up, and blurred like that?"

"But you said there were footprints in the driven snow on the verandah," persisted Harland.

"I can explain that one," said Dr. Walton. "It *had* been freezing hard. Those footsteps could have been made much earlier in the evening, just as the snow was giving over. It would have been

evidence all prepared. And a gun could have been dropped there, too. No, maybe that won't do. It was an old-fashioned pistol. Could you identify it as the gun that was used to shoot Leighton?" he asked Lang.

"I was pretty sure of it, and later we proved it," replied the inspector. "It was that gun, none other. Well, Doctor Walton, I thought I'd have a quick reconstruction of everything before the thaw altered conditions. I made the party take up the positions they had been in before the shot was fired, and I stationed Dixon on the verandah, and told him to aim at Leighton's chair the instant the police constable drew the curtains apart. It was as I thought. The window was still too opaque with mist and snow for Dixon to aim, and the constable said it was impossible to see anything on the verandah. So there we were. But the shot *had* come through the window and Leighton was killed by it."

"Then it was a booby-trap murder," said Harland. "I remember now. You said Bland had fussed around solicitously, settling Leighton in a heavy chair. Bland must have got the gun fixed outside on the window frame somehow, and trained on to the chair at the right height and angle for Leighton's head. Bland chose the split second to fire the gun when Leighton was sitting erect. He could have fired the gun by a fine line—salmon-line, say—running through the hole bored for the telephone wire, and cleared the line away during the confusion afterwards. How's that?"

"You haven't explained the essential point," objected Dr. Walton. "The gun was found lying in the snow at the edge of the verandah. It was not 'fixed outside,' as you phrase it."

Harland looked rueful. "Yes, that rather tears it," he said, and Inspector Lang laughed.

"You've forgotten my bit of curtain wire, son," he said. "It's very strong that wire—and when it's fully extended it has a powerful pull. In fact, it grips like a vise. I worked it out that you could lash the gun to the upright of the verandah with the expanding wire and take the last turn of the wire across the mouth of the gun barrel. When the gun was fired—by a line, as the lad suggested—the bullet cut the back hard as the tension was suddenly released. Which explained why I found the gun on the path and the wire in the shrubbery."

"A diabolically ingenious scheme!" exclaimed Harland.

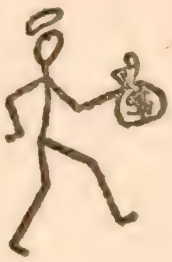
The inspector nodded, and went on grimly: "When I did the reconstruction with the bit of wire, Bland's nerve went. He broke down, and admitted everything. He had been sure at first I was just an old dodderer, some friend of Leighton's. It had never

occurred to him I was a C.I.D. man."

Inspector Lang paused to relight his pipe. "Do you know what it was made me certain it was phony?" he asked. "Not the frosted-over window, not even the wire. It was Dixon. I *knew* Dixon was a good police officer and on his toes all the time. I just couldn't believe that when Dixon heard the shot he was so slow in turning round that he neither saw nor heard the man jump from the verandah, and race across the path and into the shrubbery—particularly when the light from the window was shining straight out across the path. "You see, I believe in the lads I've trained. If Dixon didn't see a man on the verandah, it was because there wasn't any intruder there. So I looked for some hidden mechanical device, and, by heaven, I found it. Just a bit of wire."

Dr. Walton chuckled. "Good for you, Inspector. Wire-pulling, eh? The bright lads on the bond market are always pulling bits of wire. But their puppets don't always dance and the buying and selling goes against them."

"A bit of wire-pulling," exclaimed Harland. "An excellent title for the yarn, wouldn't you say?"



When the Saint looked at Eve Lavis a hand seemed to close on his heart. He had always thought of crime as a man's business, but in Singapore every rule stands reversed, and a woman whose beauty outshines the night may become an enigma as mysterious as the four murders that were mirrored in Simon's cocktail glass beneath the East's redly winking stars. Yes, the Saint returns in our next issue, after a brief month's absence, in a brand new *Charteris novelette, his most exciting to date. It may well be the longest Saint yarn we've ever published, but we stubbornly refuse to subject it to a word count.* THE PUPPERFECT LADY *is far too magnificent for that and if you're as romantic as Simon you'll pursue her with a roguish delight.*

the ivory statue

by . . . Sax Rohmer

Rarely beautiful was Paxton's ivory and gold statue, mirroring a lost art. But to Moris Klaw it also mirrored crime's double mask.

WHERE A case did not touch his peculiar interests, appeals to Moris Klaw fell upon deaf ears. However ghastly or shocking a crime, if its details were sordid, he shrank within his Wapping Street curio-shop as closely as any moss-back tortoise within its shell.

"Of what use," he said to me on one occasion, "are my acute psychic sensibilities if I am called upon to unravel the primitive mental processes of some insensitive modern savage with a hammer who has brained some unhappy washerwoman? Shall I bring to bear the delicate perceptions which it has taken me so many years to acquire solely to enable some doddering old simpleton to learn what has become of his pretty young wife? I think not."

Beyond doubt, the cases that really interested him were those that afforded fascinating scope for the exploitation of his pet theories—the eternally recurrent cycle of crime, the criminal history of all valuable relics, the indestructibility of thought.

Temperamental sleuths are by no means a rarity in modern mystery fiction, but what man in his right mind would turn his back on a locked room mystery to contemplate a Ming vase of deadly import, or pursue a rare parchment's hieroglyphics to the tomb of some ancient king with a mass murderer's contempt for every one of his subjects? You've guessed it—Sax Rohmer's amazing Moris Klaw, here sent by his famed creator on an even more chillingly audacious quest.

Copyright, 1915, 1943, by Sax Rohmer

Such a case came dramatically to my attention, and my friend Coram was instrumental in enlisting the services of Moris Klaw in solving it. You'll understand it better when I've explained how Roger Paxton, the sculptor, came to have such a valuable object in his studio as the work of art which—as we all assumed—had inspired the strange business.

It was Sir Melville Fennel who commissioned Paxton to execute a chryselephantine statue. Sir Melville's museum of sculptures, ancient and modern, is admittedly the finest private collection of the kind in the world.

The commission came as something of a surprise. The art of chryselephantine sculpture has been dead for more than two thousand years. By many modern critics, indeed, it is condemned as being not art, but a parody of art. It is the ancient Greek method of finishing a statue with gold and ivory.

Given a free hand, Paxton turned out an artistic tour de force which beguiled the critics into talking about a modern Phidias.

Based upon designs furnished by the eccentric but wealthy baronet, the statue represented a slim and graceful girl languidly reclining upon an ebony throne. The beautiful face, with its wearily closed eyes, was a triumph in itself and it was surmounted by a headdress of beaten gold intertwined among a mass of dishevelled hair. Gold bracelets and anklets, furnished by Sir Melville, were introduced into the composition; and—despite the artist's protest—a heavy girdle encrusted with gems that had been found in the tomb of some dancing girl favorite of a long-dead Pharaoh, encircled the waist.

All apart from its artistic merit the amazing work was worth a fortune—possibly ten thousand pounds. And as the baronet had agreed to its exhibition in a private gallery prior to its removal to Fennel Hall, Paxton's star was seemingly in the ascendent.

The sculptor gave one of the pleasant little dinners for which he had gained a reputation. His task was practically completed, and his friends had all been urged to come before the daylight failed, so that the statue could be viewed to its best advantage—by a window opening on his studio garden.

We were quite a discriminating bachelor party, and I shall always remember the circle of admiring faces surrounding the figure of the reclining dancer transformed by the soft light into the illusionary likeness of a living woman.

"You see," said Paxton, "this ancient art form, although it has for centuries fallen into disrepute, affords magnificent scope for

decorative purposes. In no other medium can such a richness of color be obtained. The ornaments are genuine antiques and of great value—an inspiration of my patron's."

For several minutes we stood silently admiring the beautiful workmanship. Then I inquired: "Of what is the hair composed?"

Paxton smiled. "That's a little secret I borrowed from the Greeks," he said. "Polyclitus and his contemporaries excelled at the work."

"That jeweled girdle looks detachable," I said.

"It is firmly fastened to the waist of the figure," said Paxton. "I defy any one of you to detach it inside of an hour."

"From a modern point of view, the work is an innovation," remarked one of the others thoughtfully.

Coram, curator of the Menzies Museum, who up to that moment had stood in silent, admiring contemplation of the figure, now spoke for the first time.

"The cost of the materials is too great for this style of work ever to become really popular," he said. "That girdle, by the way, represents a small fortune. Together with the anklets, armlets, and headdress, it might well tempt any burglar. What precautions have you taken, Paxton?"

"I sleep here every night," he said, "and there is always some one at the studio in the daytime —usually my model. Incidentally, a curious thing occurred last week. I had just fixed the girdle, which as you know, was once the property of Nicris, a favorite of Rameses the Third, and my model was alone here for a few minutes. As I was returning from the house I heard her cry out, and when I came to look for her she was crouching in a corner trembling. She swore that Nicris—the statue is supposed to represent her—had *moved!*"

"Imagination," said Coram. "It's easy to understand. I could believe in such a frightening illusion myself if I were here long enough—alone."

"I imagine," said Paxton, "that she must have heard some of the tales that have been circulated, regarding the girdle. It has a rather peculiar history, dating back many centuries."

Paxton nodded, and went on thoughtfully: "It was discovered in the tomb of the dancer to whom it originally belonged. It is said that an inscription was unearthed at the same time containing an account of Nicris's death under particularly horrible circumstances.

"Seton who was present at the opening of the sarcophagus—you all know him—tells me that the Arabs, on catching sight of the girdle, prostrated themselves and then took to their heels. Sir Melville Fennel's agent sent it on to England, notwithstanding, and

Sir Melville conceived the idea of this statue."

"Luckily for you," said Coram.

"Quite so," laughed Paxton; and, carefully locking the studio door, he led the way up the short path to the house.

We were a very lively party, and it was past eleven o'clock before the gathering broke up. Coram and I were the last to leave.

"Just come with me as far as the studio," urged Paxton. "I want to make sure that all's well. I'll let you out by the garden door."

We put on our coats and hats, and followed Paxton to the end of the garden, where the studio was situated. He unlocked the door and we accompanied him inside and were confronted again by the figure of Nicris—the pallid face and ams looking almost unearthly in the cold moonlight, with each jewel of the girdle and headdress glittering strangely.

"Of course," mused Coram, "the thing's scandalously irregular, a fact which the critics will not fail to impress upon you. But it is unquestionably very fine, Paxton. How uncannily human it is. I don't entirely envy you your bedchamber."

"Oh, I sleep well enough!" laughed Paxton. "No luxury, of course. Just this corner curtained off, and a camp bedstead."

"A truly Spartan couch!" I said. "Well, good night, Paxton. We shall probably see you tomorrow."

With that we parted, leaving Paxton to his unenviable and lonely vigil at the shrine of Nicris. Or was he to be envied? As my rooms were not a great distance away, a half-hour later I was in bed and asleep.

II

Some few minutes after retiring—or so it seemed to me, though a longer time had actually elapsed—I was aroused by the ringing of my telephone.

I scrambled sleepily out of bed, and picked up the receiver.

Coram was at the other end of the wire. And, now fully awake, I listened with consternation to his account of the tragedy which had prompted him to awaken me at such an unreasonable hour.

Briefly it amounted to this: Some mysterious incident, the particulars of which Coram omitted, had aroused Paxton from his sleep. Seeking the cause of the disturbance, he had unlocked the studio door and gone out into the garden.

He was absent for only a moment, and never out of ear-shot of the door. Yet upon his return the statue of Nicris had vanished!

"I have just put a phone call through to Wapping," concluded Coram. "But no answer. So I've

had a special messenger sent to Moris Klaw. I don't need to tell you that the matter is urgent. If the statue cannot be recovered its loss may mean utter ruin for Paxton."

I realized at once that he had phoned me because he shared my admiration for Moris Klaw and I knew that if Klaw came he would also want me to be present.

"I'm glad you phoned," I told Coram. "You couldn't have made a wiser decision. Shall I meet you at Paxton's?"

"Yes."

I lost little time in dressing. From Coram's brief account, the mystery appeared to be truly a dark one. Would Moris Klaw respond to such an urgent and totally unexpected midnight appeal? Or would he retreat even further into his shell?

There was little chance of his receiving a big fee, for Paxton was not a rich man. But, in justice to the remarkable individual whom it is my privilege to present to you in these chronicles, I must add that monetary considerations hardly seemed to enter into Klaw's philosophy.

He was animated, I believe, by a passionate love of the mysterious, and this affair, with its bizarre details—the ancient girdle of the dancing girl and the incident of the terrified model—was certain to arouse his interest.

Ten minutes later I was at Paxton's house. He and Coram were in the hall, and Coram himself admitted me.

"Are you convinced," he asked, turning almost immediately back to Paxton to resume a conversation which my arrival had interrupted, "that the statue could not have been taken by a burglar?"

"The double doors opening on to the street were locked and barred," Paxton replied, his voice tremulous. "The door of the garden was also locked. I was in the garden and not ten yards from the studio. I can only repeat—the statue seems to have disappeared into the empty air."

Incredible though the story appeared, its confirmation was to be found in Paxton's face. I was horrified to see how haggard he looked.

"It will ruin me," he said, and repeated the statement again and again.

"Only if the loss is permanent," I said, in an effort to console him. "Surely you haven't given up hope of recovering the statue! A robbery so audacious could hardly have been accomplished without leaving *some* clue behind."

"Robbery!" repeated Paxton, looking at me strangely. "You would never make such a statement, Searles, if you had heard what I heard."

I glanced at Coram, but he merely shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Then Coram has not told you?"

I shook my head.

"He has told me only that something aroused you in the night, and that you left the studio to investigate."

"I did, yes. Something aroused me, but it was no more than a ghostly voice which I couldn't even be sure I hadn't heard between sleeping and waking—a voice in a dream."

"Just when was that?"

"It would be, I suppose, about two hours after you left. I was soundly asleep in the studio when I suddenly awoke and sat up to listen, for it seemed to me that I heard a cry immediately outside the door."

"What kind of cry?"

"I was by no means certain at first. But after a brief interval it was repeated. It sounded more like the voice of a man, and it uttered but one word: 'Nicris'!"

"And then?"

"I leapt out of bed and stood for a moment in doubt. The thing seemed so uncanny. The electric light has not, as you know, an outlet in the studio, or I'd have switched it on. For possibly a minute I hesitated. Then, as I pulled the curtains aside and stood by the door to listen, the cry was repeated for the third time, coming from immediately outside."

"Are you referring to the door that opens onto the garden?"

"Yes, the door next to my bed. The third cry decided me. Taking up the small revolver which I've kept handy since completing the statue, I unlocked the door and stepped out into the garden—"

Paxton broke off to listen attentively to the unmistakable sounds of a car drawing up outside the house. It was followed by the sound of a rumbling voice.

Coram sprang to the door.

"Moris Klaw!" I cried.

"Good morning, Mr. Coram!" said the strange voice from the darkness outside. "Good morning, Mr. Searles!"

Moris Klaw appeared in the doorway. He wore the flat-topped bowler, the long, shabby coat, and the doubled-back cape of Continental weave which had become so familiar to me by now.

As he peered into the shadows of the hall, his scanty, colorless beard appeared to be waging a hopeless struggle to soften the gaunt outlines of a face rendered more cadaverous and more yellow even than usual by the dim light at his back.

"And this," he said, as the anxious sculptor came forward, "is Mr. Paxton, who has lost his statue? Good morning, sir!"

He bowed, removing the bowler and revealing his high brow. Coram was about to close the door. Moris Klaw said quickly: "A moment, sir, if you don't

mind. Without my daughter I would be at a complete loss."

Paxton stared, not comprehending; but stared yet harder when Isis Klaw appeared. She was wearing a loosely-belted Swiss Alps-type sports jacket which effectually concealed her slender figure, and her darkly beautiful face was shadowed by a wide-brimmed, stylishly becoming hat.

"This is Mr. Paxton," said her father, indicating the sculptor. Then, addressing Coram and myself: "Perhaps you expected me to come alone. I don't know why the presence of my daughter should so disturb impressionable bachelors. Is it because she is so beautiful?" He sighed and mopped his brow.

"Why am I here, I wonder, an old fool who ought to be asleep. Is it because of the girdle your statue wore? I so well remember when it was dug up. I do not know its history, but I am sure it is evil. Tell me about it from the beginning, please, Mr. Paxton."

"I am greatly indebted to you. Won't you come in and sit down?" said Paxton, glancing at the girl in admiration.

"No, no!" said Klaw. "Let us stand. It is good to stand upright, for it is his ability to do this that makes man superior to the other mammals."

Coram and I were familiar with Klaw's mannerisms, but I could see that Paxton thought him to be a unique kind of lunatic.

Nevertheless, he narrated the events of the night before up to the point he had reached at Moris Klaw's arrival.

"Proceed slowly now," said Klaw. "You say you left the door open behind you?"

"Yes, but I was never more than ten yards from it," Paxton replied. "It would have been physically impossible for anyone to remove the statue unknown to me. You must remember that it is extremely heavy."

"One moment," I interrupted. "Are you sure that the statue was in its place before you came out?"

"I am certain of it. There was a bright moon, and the face of the figure was the first thing my eyes fell upon when I pulled the curtain aside."

"Did you touch it?" rumbled Moris Klaw.

"No," replied Paxton, puzzled. "There was no occasion for me to do so."

"What a pity, Mr. Paxton! The sense of touch is so exquisite—"

We all wondered at his words.

"I stepped just outside the door," Paxton resumed, "and stared into the shadows. There was no one in sight. Then I walked to the wall—a matter of some ten yards—pulled myself up by my hands, and looked over into the street.

"It was deserted, save for a constable on the opposite corner. I know him slightly, and his presence convinced me that no one could have entered or escaped from the garden by way of the wall. I did not call him, but immediately returned to the studio door."

"Just how long would you say you were absent from the studio?" asked Moris Klaw.

"Not a second over half a minute," Paxton replied.

"And when you returned once more to the door?"

"A single glance showed me that the statue was gone!"

"Good Heavens!" I said. "It sounds impossible! Was the constable on duty?"

"He was." Paxton assured me. "There is always an officer there. He stood in sight of the double doors opening onto the street during the whole time. Nicris unquestionably came out by way of the garden or melted into thin air. But since the only exit from the garden also opens on the street, how, except by magic, could the statue have been removed from the premisses?"

"Unfortunately," said Moris Klaw, "you talk of magic as one talks of onions! How little you know how far-reaching may be its implications. But go on."

"The throne," continued Paxton, who was becoming impressed despite himself, "was not disturbed."

"It wasn't even moved," Klaw murmured. "I see. Tell me, was the statue attached to it?"

"Only partially so," Paxton replied. "Materials for completing the work were to have arrived today."

"How long would it have taken you to detach it?" asked Klaw.

"Granting some knowledge of the nature of the work, not long. Perhaps half an hour. As I have said, in that one respect it was incomplete."

"Then," I said, "it can be summarized like this. In the course of thirty seconds, during which time a constable was in plain view of one entrance and you were not ten yards from the other, some one detached the statue from the throne—an operation involving half an hour's skilled labor—and unseen by yourself or the officer removed it from the studio."

"Oh, the thing is impossible!" groaned Paxton. "There is something unearthly in the affair. I wish I had never set eyes upon that accursed girdle!"

"Don't curse the girdle," rumbled Moris Klaw. "Curse instead its wearer. Now tell me. On finding Nicris missing, what did you do?"

"I searched the studio hastily. A brief investigation convinced me that neither the statue nor the thief was concealed there. I then came out. I locked the door, and

after examining the garden, hailed the constable. He had been on duty for four hours at that point, and he had observed absolutely nothing of an unusual nature. He saw my guests come out by the garden entrance, and from that time until I hailed him nothing, he assured me, had come in or gone out!"

"He didn't hear the cry?"

"No. But it wasn't loud enough to be audible from the corner."

"One more question," said Klaw, "have you informed Scotland Yard?"

"No," answered Paxton. "And the constable will make no report because I withheld from him the object of my inquiries. If this business gets into the papers I shall be a ruined man!"

"I have hopes," Klaw assured him, "that it will never reach the papers. Let us go now to the scene of these incredible happenings. It is my custom, Mr. Paxton, to remain very quietly at the scene of a mystery, and from the impressions which come to me I can sometimes recover the key to the labyrinth."

We proceeded to the studio.

As far as I could see, all of its furnishings looked exactly as they had when I had last seen them, except, of course that Nicris's throne was vacant. The top of the studio was partially glazed, and Moris Klaw peered up at it earnestly.

"I should like to climb up there, and look down from both sides of the roof. Is there any way I could?"

"There's a stepladder in the studio," answered Paxton. "I will bring it out."

He did so. The gray light of dawn was creeping into the sky, and against that somber background we watched Moris Klaw crawling about the roof like some giant spider.

"Did you find anything?" asked Paxton anxiously, as Klaw descended.

"Exactly what I was searching for," Klaw replied, "and no man is entitled to find more. Isis, my child, will you please reverse that ebony chair, so that I will be facing the garden door."

The girl stepped onto the dais, and did as her father directed.

"I can tell you this," explained Moris Klaw, "whoever robbed you, Mr. Paxton, is in very great danger, however clever his plans. There is, in every criminal scheme, one little point that only fate can decide. Upon that extremely vital point his or her mind will concentrate at the critical moment. The critical moment here was that of getting Nicris out of your studio.

"I shall spend a few hours on the throne where your ivory dancer reclined. This sensitive plate —he tapped his brow—"will reproduce a negative of that critical moment, as the criminal's mind

interpreted it. Isis, return in the cab that waits. I shall expect you here again at nine o'clock."

He placed his quaint hat upon a table and laid beside it his black cloak. Then, a gaunt, oddly preoccupied figure he reclined upon the big ebony chair.

"Place my cloak about me, Isis," he requested.

The girl did so.

"Now leave me, please. All of you." Moris Klaw closed his eyes.

"I'm afraid I don't understand —" began Paxton.

Isis placed a finger to her lips, and signed to us to withdraw silently. "Sh-h," she whispered. "He will be asleep in a moment."

III

At five minutes to nine Isis Klaw returned and rang the doorbell.

Coram and I had spent the intervening three hours in discussing the utterly inexplicable happenings, and its effect on Paxton. Again and again he had asked us: "Do you think I should call in Scotland Yard? If Moris Klaw fails, consider the priceless time lost!"

"If Moris Klaw fails," Coram assured him, "no one else will succeed."

We admitted Isis, who wore now a smart tweed costume and a small, attractive hat. Beyond doubt, Isis Klaw was a strikingly beautiful woman.

At the door of the studio stood her father, staring straight up at the morning sky, as though he hoped to find in its unfathomable brightness a solution to the mystery.

"What time does your model come?" he asked before Paxton could question him.

"About half past ten, usually. But Mr. Klaw—" began our anxious friend.

"Where does that lane behind the studio lead to?" Klaw rumbled on, without giving him a chance to finish.

"It's the tradesman's entrance to the next house!" Paxton told him.

"Whose house?" Klaw asked sharply.

"Dr. Gleason's. He has lived there for some time."

"Is he an M.D.?"

"Yes. But tell me, Mr. Klaw—have you any clue?"

"Would it surprise you, Mr. Paxton, if I told you that Nicris was not stolen away, but *walked*."

"Walked? Surely you can't be serious."

"Oh, but I am!" said Moris Klaw. "Suppose I told you that she is concerned, this barbaric dancing girl, with two things. One is a very big man. She thinks as she walks, of his height—six feet, three inches at least! So it cannot be you, Mr. Paxton. We must find and identify him."

He looked intently at Paxton. "Tell me the name of your ac-

quaintance, the post policeman."

We were all staring at Moris Klaw, spellbound with astonishment. But Paxton managed to mumble: "James — Constable James."

"We must have a talk with him at the police station," rumbled Klaw. "What an amazing Science is that of odic photography."

What did he mean? None of us had the slightest idea, and I could see that poor Paxton put no faith whatever in the unusual methods of my eccentric friend."

He would have voiced his doubts, I think, if he had not met a glance from the dark eyes of Isis Klaw which silenced him.

"My child," said Klaw to his daughter, "I will not need you again this morning. My negative is a clear one. You understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Isis with composure.

"Breakfast—" began Paxton, tentatively.

But Moris Klaw shook his head. "We have not time for that," he said. "There is too much to be done."

As if deciding that he could not waste another minute he asked me to accompany him to the local police station. On the way a thought occurred to me.

"Tell me," I said, "what was the other thing of which you spoke? I'm referring to your statement about the statue, although I don't understand in the least how one can refer to the 'thoughts' of an ivory statue!"

"Have patience," rumbled my companion, "I will explain it later—that second dreadful fear of the missing one."

Arriving at the police station, I asked, "Shall I see if I can find Constable James?"

To my surprise Klaw shook his head. "No," he said. "I am looking for the constable whom James relieved."

Inquiry showed that the latter officer—his name was Freeman —had just entered the station.

Morris Klaw's questions elicited the following, though its bearing upon the matter in hand was not immediately evident to me. Toward twelve o'clock—that is, shortly before Freeman was relieved—a man, supporting a woman, came down the street and entered the gate of Dr. Gleason's house.

The woman wore a long dark coat which entirely concealed her face and figure. But from her feeble step the constable judged her to be ill.

Considering the lateness of the hour, he also concluded that the case must be a serious one; and further supposed the sick woman to be a resident of the neighborhood, since she came on foot.

He had begun to wonder at the length of the consultation when, nearly an hour later, the man appeared again from the

shadows of the drive, still supporting the woman. Pausing at the gateway, he had waved his hand to the policeman. Constable Freeman ran aross the road immediately.

"Fetch me a taxicab, officer," said the stranger, his arm about his companion and exhibiting much solicitude.

Freeman promptly went to the corner of Beria Road and returned with a cab from the all-night stand.

"Open the door," directed the man, who was a person of imposing height—some six feet three, Freeman assured us.

Klaw looked at me triumphantly, but I was merely growing more bewildered.

With that, carefully wrapping the cloak about the woman's figure the big man gently assisted her into the cab. The only glimpse the constable obtained of her was that of a small foot clad in a silk stocking. She had apparently dropped her shoe. The man bent and whispered some word of encouragement to her, then directed the cabman to drive to the Hotel Cecil.

"Did you give him your assistance?" asked Moris Klaw.

"No," Freeman replied. "He did not seem to need it."

"What was the number of the cab?"

Freeman took out his notebook and supplied the information.

"Thank you, Constable Freeman," said Klaw. "You are a very alert police officer. Good morning, sir."

Again satisfaction beamed from behind my companion's glasses. But to my eyes the darkness grew momentarily less penetrable. For these inquiries bore upon matters which had occurred prior to twelve o'clock. And Coram, myself, and Paxton had seen the statue in its usual place a few minutes after midnight! My brain was in a turmoil!

"That cab was from the big garage at Brixton," said Moris Klaw. "We shall ring up the Brixton garage and try to find out where the man may be found. Perhaps, if Providence is with us —and Providence is with the alert—he is still at home asleep."

From a public telephone we rang up the garage and learned that the man we wanted was not required to report for duty until ten o'clock. We experienced some difficulty in obtaining his home address, but finally it was given to us. To that address we hastened and aroused the man from his bed.

"A big gentleman and a lady obviously ill," said Moris Klaw. "They hired your cab from Dr. Gleeson's, near Beria Road, at about twelve o'clock last night. You drove them to the Cecil Hotel."

"No, sir," the driver replied. "He changed the address afterward. I've been wondering why.

I drove him to number Six A, Rectory Grove, Old Town, Clapham."

"Was the lady recovered by then?"

"Partly, sir. I heard him talking to her. But he carried her into the house."

"I see," said Moris Klaw. "The best laid plans can be toppled by the faintest of ill winds. What a great science is the science of the mind!"

IV

With a chuckle of satisfaction, Moris Klaw read the name-plate on the door. Several times Moris Klaw knocked loudly upon the door of the house in Clapham, Old Town. It was a small one, standing well back from the roadway. Within we could hear someone coughing.

Then the door was suddenly thrown wide, and a man appeared who must have been at least six feet three inches tall. He had extremely handsome features, was clean-shaven, and wore silver pince-nez.

Klaw's first words had a surprising effect. "Good morning, Colette." he rumbled. "Has Nina caught cold?"

The other glared in utter consternation, falling back a step, and clenching his fists.

"I said good morning, Jean Colette!" said Moris Klaw. "You do not know me, but I know you. I am quite sure you would rather talk to me than to a quite unreasonable police officer."

For a moment longer the big man hesitated, angry irresolution in his stare. Then clearly he saw that surrender was inevitable. He shrugged his shoulders, and stepped quickly back from the door.

"Come in, *messieurs,*" he said, with a decided French accent.

He said no more, but led the way into a long bare room at the rear of the house.

To call the apartment a laboratory would have been permissible, but not inclusive, for it was, in addition, quite obviously a studio and a workshop.

Glancing rapidly around him, Moris Klaw asked: "Where is it?"

The man's face was a study in conflicting emotion as he stood before us, looking steadily at Klaw. Then a smile indescribably winning hovered evanescently on his thin lips.

"You are very clever, and I know when I am beaten," he said. "But had you came four hours later it would have been one hour too late."

He strode across the room to where a tall screen stood; seized it by the top, and hurled it to the ground.

Behind, on a model's dais, reclined the statue of Nicris. in a low chair!

"You have already removed

the girdle and one of the anklets," rumbled Klaw.

That was true. Indeed, it now became evident that the man had been interrupted by our arrival. Opening a leather case that stood beside the dais, he quickly produced the missing ornaments.

"What action will be taken, *monsieur?*" he asked quietly.

"No action, Jean," replied Moris Klaw, "It would be impossible, you see. But why did you delay so long?"

The other's reply was unexpected. "It is a task demanding much time and care if the statue is not to be ruined. Otherwise I should have performed it in Mr. Paxton's studio and avoided the risks involved in removing the figure. Nina's condition has caused me grave anxiety throughout the night."

He stared hard at Moris Klaw. We could hear the sound of coughing from some room nearby.

"Who are you, *monsieur?*" he asked pointedly.

"An old fool who knew Nina when she posed at Julien's," Klaw said. "I knew you also, Jean, in Paris. When I saw your name outside I was certain that what I guessed had happened."

A half hour later, Coram, Paxton, myself and Moris Klaw sat in Paxton's studio, gazing with immeasurable relief at the recovered statue.

"It was so evident," explained Klaw, looking directly at Paxton, "that since you were absent from here for only thirty seconds it would have been virtually impossible for anyone to have removed the statue after Coram and Searles left."

"But some one did!" protested Paxton.

"Not during that time," rumbled Moris Klaw. "Nicris was removed while you all were within the house."

"But, my dear Mr. Klaw, Searles, and Coram saw the statue later than that—a little after midnight."

"Wrong, my frend! They saw the *model*. And so did you!"

"You mean—they saw *Nina?*"

"They saw Mme. Colette, whom I knew in Paris as Nina. Listen carefully. When I dropped off to sleep I had a clear impression of something tragic happening to a very large man. I dreamed also that I was in mortal fear of being touched. I looked down at myself, and I was no longer the man you see before you. I was Nina, with her ivory limbs —Nina decked with gold. Nina's emotions in an earlier hour, you see, had taken complete possession of my sleeping mind.

"About midnight, when your party was at its height, Jean Colette, a clever scamp of an artist I knew once in Paris goes into the house of Dr. Gleason, supporting Nina—your model. He is seen by Constable Freeman. When the

trees hide them they climb over the fence into the lane and over the wall into your garden. Nina has a cast of the studio key. It was easy enough for her to get it!

"Jean, a clever rogue with his hands, who might have been a great artist, detaches the figure from the throne and arrays it as *madame*—in *madame's* outer garments. Beneath her cloak *madame* is Nicris—with paste copies of the jewels to complete the deception.

"He is resourceful, this Jean. He is also a man of great strength—a modern Crotonian Milo. Not only does he carry that heavy statue from the studio. He lifts it over the wall—did *madame* assist?—and into Dr. Gleason's drive. He bears it to the gate, wrapped in Nina's long coat. He calls a policeman. Here is genius at work. He gives the wrong address. He is completely cool and self-possessed.

"Do they make their escape immediately? No, they are far too wise. They know that you, finding Nicris missing, will apply to the post policeman and seize upon a thread. Jean thinks *I will make it appear that the robbery took place at a later time. I will thereby gain hours! Another policeman will be on duty when the discovery is made. He will know nothing of what took place.* He leaves Nina to pretend to be Nicris!

"Nina has courage, but she is also genuinely frightened. Most of all she dreads that you will *touch* her! You do not, and Jean with the ivory statue safe at Clapham, returns for Nina. He comes into the doctor's drive by the farther gate — where the policeman cannot see him. He wears rubber shoes. He mounts to the studio roof and lies flat upon the ledge above the door. His voice is falsetto. He calls 'Nicris!'

"Presently you come out. You stare into the shadows and you see Nina. She has stretched up her white arms—so like the arms of the real statue—and he is waiting to raise her up beside him.

"But why to the roof, and not over the wall? Because the path is of gravel and her feet are bare. On the roof, upon the grime, are marks of small, bare feet. There are also marks of a man's rubber shoes, and, half-way along, marks of smaller shoes which he had brought for Nina. He has forethought. They retire by the farther gate of your neighbor's drive. No doubt he brought her a coat as well. But she contracts a chill."

A maid entered the studio.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," she announced.

"Ask him to come in," Paton said.

A short interval—and Jean Colette entered, hat in hand.

"Here are two wedges, *mon-*

sieur"—he said, bowing to Paxton, "which help to attach the girdle. I forgot to return them. *Adieu!* I am summoned to Paris by the magic of spring."

He placed the wedges on a table and, amidst a dramatic silence, withdrew.

"A true touch of Paris!" Moris Klaw exclaimed, admiringly. "Did I not say he was an artist to his fingertips?"

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a rose from carmen

by . . . Herbert Harris

If Detective Clay had known the language of the flowers—he might have solved the mystery of the ash-blonde crooner's diamond ring.

THE SPANISH dancer was glamorous enough, but I could hardly wait for her to relinquish the spotlight to the only girl I really cared about. You can't be in love with a girl without being prejudiced about her voice, and I was sure that Tessa's singing abilities alone would carry her from that little back-street cafe to one of the swankier night-clubs—perhaps to the Blue Note itself.

The girl in the mantilla was dancing too long, making me nervous. She tossed a flower to the tired-looking used-car salesman sitting next to me and his florid face beamed up at her. I thought, with a yawn: "This gives him a big lift. His wife just doesn't understand him. Will Tessa and I ever get like that when we're married?" I didn't think so, and I had no intention of letting it worry me.

Presently Tessa Dale appeared. She looked pale and strained, and her voice sounded less good tonight. "The kid's been overdoing it," I thought. "She really needs a holiday."

It is perhaps a little easier for a mystery writer to set the stage for an ingenious theft than to dispose of a murder victim. A corpse takes up a certain amount of space, and even when skillfully incinerated leaves an embarrassing residue of evidence. Possibly that is why Herbert Harris chose theft for his theme in this highly entertaining and carefully plotted crime drama in miniature. But we rather suspect he was keen on the idea anyway.

I didn't wait for the rest of the show. None of it appealed to me—least of all, Sherry Glyn, the ash-blonde female crooner whose style at the microphone made me feel as if I were wading in treacle.

I went back to the performers' dressing rooms to see Tessa. Normally, I should have been taking her home, but tonight everyone was staying for a birthday party Sherry Glyn was giving after the show. As I walked past the headwaiter I said: "Hello, Joe."

"Just a minute," Joe said, stepping quickly to my side. "If you're looking for Tessa Dale, she's not going just yet."

"I know about the party." I told him.

"It's not that," Joe said. "There's been some trouble—serious trouble. The police are here. Somebody stole a diamond ring from Sherry Glyn's dressing table."

"When did this happen?" I asked.

"Earlier this evening," Joe said. "The manager phoned the police. A detective named Clay has been questioning everyone—including me. He wanted to know if anyone had left. But nobody's been in or out. I assured him of that."

"What made you mention Tessa especially?" I asked.

Joe frowned. "I thought you ought to know that the detective's with her now," he said uneasily.

Tessa shared a room with the Spanish dancer Carmen Zamora. When I got there, Carmen was sitting with her arm round Tessa trying to console her. Tessa was sobbing into a handkerchief. The detective glanced at me sharply as I went in.

"It's all right," I said. "I'm Miss Dale's fiancé. The headwaiter just told me what happened."

"It isn't me, it isn't me," Tessa kept repeating.

I looked at the detective. "Are you accusing my fiancée of taking Miss Glyn's ring?" I demanded.

He replied angrily: "I'm accusing nobody. Miss Dale seems to resent being questioned. It's hard for me to understand why."

"Has she got the ring?" I demanded.

"Nobody seems to have it," Clay said. "We searched all of the dressing rooms, and every one of the performers insisted on being searched. They were very anxious to clear themselves."

"Then you've nothing against Miss Dale?" I said.

"Only that she was in Miss Glyn's room, and dropped her handkerchief by the dressing table," he replied. "She denies having been in the room at all."

"If she took the ring, what has she done with it?" Carmen Zamora interrupted challengingly.

Clay retorted: "That's what we intend to find out."

"The fact that her handkerchief was found in the room doesn't prove Miss Dale herself was in there," I said. "Someone else could have planted it by the dressing table to incriminate her."

"I read detective stories, too," Clay told me crisply.

"I happen to write them," I parried.

Tessa got up. "I'll come with you now, if you want me to," she said to the detective.

I gripped her arm. "I'll follow you as soon as I can, darling," I said. "I just want to stay here until the last show goes on, and see what I can find out."

Carmen Zamora and I watched them go out. I said to the Spanish dancer: "Did Tessa have any personal enemies. Think hard."

"Not that I know of," she said. "Everyone likes her."

"They'll never prove anything that would stand up in court," I said. "But we've got to clear Tessa of all suspicion. An accusation like this could ruin her career."

It was then that I chanced to look down at the floor, and saw the snapshot lying under the dressing table. I picked it up. It was a photo of a small, dark, swarthy man in evening clothes.

"Is this yours, or Tessa's?" I asked.

Carmen quickly took it from me. "It's mine," she said. "It must have fallen out of my bag." She returned the snapshot to her handbag.

"I thought for a moment I knew him," I said frowning. "Does Tessa know him?"

"No, he's just a friend of mine." Carmen assured me. "You wouldn't know him—nor would Tessa." She paused. "I know just how terrible this is for Tessa. What are your plans? What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," I replied. "But there are several people I intend to have a talk with."

The Spanish dancer looked at her watch. "You won't have long," she said. "Sherry Glyn's just gone on. The second floor show will finish in about a quarter-of-an-hour."

I left her, and stood in the corridor thinking for a moment. Something had clicked in my brain. I didn't remain in the dressing-room section at all. Instead, I went back into the restaurant and sat down just behind the front row of tables.

Presently a novelty song and dance act came on. As soon as it was over, I turned to the man who had been sitting next to me.

"Listen to me, mister," I said. "I didn't want to create a scene while the show was on. But we have reason to believe you can help us in connection with the

theft of a diamond ring from Miss Glyn's dressing room."

It was a shot in the dark. If he had returned my stare blankly I wouldn't have known what to do next. But I saw his cheeks pale and a look of guilt come into his face. He was very obviously a Latin with a temperament to match.

"We have questioned Miss Carmen Zamora," I told him.

I saw his hand come from his pocket, and something fell to the floor. I stooped, and picked it up. At that moment he made a dive for the exit, but he didn't get far. I haven't played quarterback for nothing.

When he had been handcuffed and led away I sat down with quiet satisfaction and had a little talk with Officer Clay.

The detective's tone was a trifle acid. "I suppose you think of yourself as very much the budding sleuth?"

I smiled at him. "The word 'budding' is quite apropos," I said, and glanced at the red rose in his hand—the red rose which my neighbor at the next table had tried to throw away. The red, red rose which Carmen had tossed to him from the floor—with Sherry Glyn's ring hidden deep within its curving petals.

"Still," Clay conceded, "it was pretty smart to connect that photo with the guy she threw the flower to."

"It is occasionally quite easy to put two and two together," I said, modestly.

A hall clock strikes a murder requiem's opening chords—beneath the darkly weaving baton of a master of suspense in the most terrifying of human homecomings

THE DEATH STONE

By CORNELL WOOLRICH

A mystery writer whose readers are legion explores the darkest recesses of a criminal's mind, with a Scotland Yard sleuth his pen has made famous

A CASE FOR COLONEL MARCH

By CARTER DICKSON

in the next SAINT

information obtained

by . . . William MacHarg

She was just a scared kid—far too terrified to recognize the man behind the murder gun. So O'Malley trapped him the hard way.

O'MALLEY SAID, "It's a parked-car killing. A good time, free and easy spender named Murford and a girl named Miss Comlin had made the rounds of the night clubs. Between three and four this morning they was sitting in Murford's car parked on the East Side. Somebody in another car drove up alongside of 'em and shot Murford dead. They put me on the case, but I don't know why. Cops have already collared the guy they claim done it."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"They pinched the girl's brother. This business goes this way: The girl is eighteen years old and comes of good family. Her father is dead. Her and her mother met Murford in Florida and didn't know nothing about him. Well, Murford was a guy well-known in all New York night spots, who'd been married a few times and had went with a lot of women. When they got back to New York, the brother found out about him. He seen Murford and told him to stay away from his sister, but Mur-

We've pointed out before that the singular charm which William MacHarg's O'Malley exercises for all readers, from business executives to grandmothers, is as hard to pin down as the pinions of Pegasus. But it bears repeating, for Officer O'Malley is with us again in all of his gusty, slangy, doggedly persistent pertinacity, his bad grammar a thing wondrous and apart, and forgivable we feel, by the sternest of pedagogues. And how he shines as a referee of murder!

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ford kept seeing her; so then the boy threatened him. Last night this brother, named Edward Comlin, was in his car going around to the night spots looking for 'em. Then this Murford got shot."

"Is that all they've got against the brother?" I asked.

"Cops found a gun in the boy's car—that's why they pinched him. It had been fired, but we don't know if it's the right gun yet. If it turns out that it is, there don't seem to be anything to the case. Still, they got to give me something to do, so I'm supposed to be working on it."

They had the girl at headquarters. She was blonde and quite beautiful and was rather hysterical. Her mother was with her. She was a fine-looking woman.

"You know anything about this?" O'Malley asked Mrs. Comlin.

"Only that I'm certain my son did not do it," she told him. "I always try to stay awake till the children come in, but children come in so late. I had been asleep. Then I heard Edward come in."

"What time?"

"It was about five o'clock. Evelyn didn't come in. Then a policeman came and brought me down here and I learned this terrible thing. Since then I know they have arrested Edward."

"You tell us how all this was," O'Malley said to the girl.

"I don't know how it was. I don't know who shot him. Mr. Murford and I had been around to those places."

"What places?"

She told us.

"You have any trouble at any of them resorts?" O'Malley asked.

"No. After we'd started home Mr. Murford wanted to park."

"I guess you parked sometimes like that before."

"Sometimes—yes. But last night—"

"Wait a minute. You always park in the same place?"

"No—different places. We'd never stopped at that one before. We'd only just stopped when someone drove up beside us and started to shoot."

"Yeah? Who?"

"I didn't see who. I keep telling them that. When he started to shoot I dropped down on the floor of the car; then I didn't look. He shot several times. Then his car drove away. After he'd gone I got out of our car and went looking for someone, but there was no one around. Then a man came along the street and I told him what had happened and he went to a drugstore and called the police."

"Well, if you didn't see the guy how do you know it wasn't your brother?"

"I'm sure that it wasn't."

"She'd say that anyway," O'Malley observed to me later. "Except this happened after three o'clock we don't know just the time of it. The guy she met on the street called the station house at three twenty-five. All the boy says is he don't know *where* he was just at that time. We won't find out anything but I got to go talk with him."

They had Comlin at a station house. We went there to see him. He was twenty years old and distinctly good-looking.

"So you knocked the guy off," O'Malley remarked.

"No."

"Say, we sympathize with you. A guy like that Murford had no right to go round with your sister. You told him he hadn't. Last night you caught up with him."

"I tell you, I didn't find them. I went around looking for them."

"Where?"

He gave us the names of some night clubs. "All I intended, if I was able to find them, was to make my sister come home."

"You need a gun to do that?"

"I didn't have any gun."

"Son, what will lying get you? Cops found the gun in the door pocket of your car."

"Well," O'Malley declared, when we got back to headquarters, "we might see what the cops got." He read the reports. "They don't know yet about the gun. They got some things about Murford. He was one time a stockbroker. Now he claimed he had no business but just lived on investments. Cops can't find them investments. I don't see no harm in that girl. Murford wasn't a guy to sit in a car with a girl if she would have went somewhere else with him.

"She's young and I guess she didn't like her brother to tell her who she should go with. She found it exciting to visit them night spots with a guy who knew everybody. It's the same with the boy. He might have done murder because of his sister, but it's my idea he'd be more likely to take a sock at that Murford."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"When it gets the right time we'll go round to them night clubs."

I met him that night and we went to the night clubs. O'Malley had been quite right in saying we wouldn't learn anything. Murford and Miss Comlin had visited three of the places and Comlin had been there, too—but not until they'd left. He'd inquired at a number of others as well. At all of them O'Malley asked the same questions of doormen and managers.

"A young guy come here last night looking for Murford?"

"That's right. I told him he wasn't here."

"Did he say who he was?"

"No. He was excited and said he had to see Murford. When he saw Murford wasn't there he got in his car and went away."

It was four o'clock in the morning when O'Malley called up headquarters. "Well," he said, after talking with them, "that is the right gun. They got three bullets out of the dead guy, and bullets fired from the gun have got the same markings on 'em, so it has to be the gun that killed Murford."

"There's the case, then," I told him. "It's an unhappy affair."

"Yeah. Cops been tracing the gun. It turns out it's a stolen gun that got took several months ago in a store holdup. A stolen gun can't be traced and a dozen guys could have owned it since."

"Including," I said, "young Comlin."

"Well, somebody owned it."

I told him I'd enjoyed the evening.

"Me, too. I guess one night in them places has give me the habit. We'll do it again tonight."

I met him at midnight and we went to another night club. It wasn't one of those Murford and Miss Comlin had been to, but I remembered Comlin had said he'd been there. O'Malley appeared particular. He refused two tables that were offered us but finally found one to suit him. The owner of the place was named Elphin. He passed us, sleek and black-haired, and spoke to us but he didn't sit down. A small man who appeared very drunk stared at us from a table near us and then came and sat down with us.

"Leave me buy you a drink," he requested.

He ordered a bottle of wine and paid for it from a roll of bills as thick as my wrist. Then, all at once, he appeared very angry.

"I think you're a cop," he accused O'Malley. "I got no use for a cop!"

He tried to throw the wine from his glass into O'Malley's face. But none of it got on O'Malley and most of it got on himself, and some waiters came running.

"The gentleman's just had too much to drink," O'Malley informed them. "No reason to start any trouble. I and my friend was just leaving here anyway."

"Well," he remarked outside, after we'd left the little man blinking into his wineglass, "that was a swell joint one time, but it's getting a bad name lately. I guess it's a good place to stay out of. The broad-shouldered young guy that waited on us is named Eddie Dupel. The doorman is named Johnny Forey. I might tell you something: Murford went a lot to that place, but he ain't been going there re-

cently. I don't know what you're going to do but I'm going to bed."

I took a cab home and he phoned me next day to come to headquarters. I was busy and couldn't go then, so I went around later.

"Too bad," he informed me, "you're late and the case is all over. The guy that knocked off Murford is in the captain's room signing his confession."

Comlin and his mother and sister were there and I was surprised because the little man who had been drunk at the night club was looking on curiously. Then the door to the captain's office opened and a couple of cops came out, bringing out Elphin.

"Elphin did it, O'Malley?" I inquired.

"You said it!"

"Explain."

"Why, it's one of them Lexington Avenue in the Fifties businesses. Murford backed certain gambling games but it wasn't known he was connected with 'em. Him and Elphin was supposed to be friends but Murford didn't have any friends in the easy money racket. Elphin had got a gambling instinct and he played them games, and Murford figured to get him into debt and take over the night club. Elphin claims now the games wasn't straight. However that was, they got ways on Lexington Avenue of collecting them debts and Elphin was going to lose his club. Just lately he found out Murford was going to get it."

"I see."

"Yeah. Elphin was watching whatever went on about Murford. So when Comlin come to his place asking for Murford, Elphin seen him. He got out of Comlin who he was and that he was looking for his sister. Elphin hadn't never met Miss Comlin. The boy was excited and acted threatening, and it come to Elphin that, if Murford got knocked off while Comlin was going around seeking him that way, people would figure Comlin had did it, and Elphin might keep his club. He figured it smart from the start."

"I see," I repeated.

"Elphin had in his safe a gun that couldn't be traced. First, he told Comlin some places where he said Murford might be, but they was places he knew Murford wasn't likely to go. The idea was to make Comlin keep on looking. Then he sent a guy from his place out to a pay telephone to find out where Murford really was. A party of guests at his place, who he knew would stay till closing, had left their car keys with the doorman. Elphin put on a coat and a hat over his eyes and went out an entrance only used by employees. Then he got the keys from the doorman and used them people's car and went where he'd learned

Murford was and waited for him and Miss Comlin to come out."

"Quick thinking," I stated.

"It's the kind of thinking guys do on Lexington Avenue. Elphin knew he couldn't knock the girl off, too, because Comlin wouldn't have done that. But Miss Comlin had never seen him and people can't describe very well someone they only see once, and that time in part dark. Besides, if she said it wasn't her brother people wouldn't believe her. When they come out, Elphin followed along behind 'em, but there was always cars near. He was surprised when they parked, but it give him his chance. When he started to shoot, Miss Comlin got down on the floor of the car and she didn't even look while he shot Murford twice more."

O'Malley tugged at his chin.

"A neat murder," I said.

"Sure—according to plan. A planned murder is this way: After it's done, the guy gets to wondering if his plan could be better. Elphin's plan had been to get rid of the gun. Now he wondered could the gun be made proof against Comlin? When he'd talked with Comlin he'd got the idea that if the boy couldn't find his sister he might come back to Elphin's place. Elphin didn't know Comlin's car but his doorman had seen it. He figured that some of the guys that worked for him would guess he'd bumped Murford but they wouldn't tell.

"When he got back to the night club he give the gun to the doorman. The doorman had noticed that when Comlin parked his car he took the keys with him but didn't lock the car door. Well, Comlin didn't come back to Elphin's, but he came to a place near there. When he'd left his car, the doorman walked down there and wiped off the gun and put it into the door pocket."

"It all worked out so smoothly," I said, "I don't see how you solved it."

"Well, we had to find someone who wanted to knock off Murford, who knew Comlin was looking for him, and who could have planted the gun."

"All right."

"We found several people all them things could be true of. The only reason we started with Elphin was Murford had stopped going to this place and we got rumors there'd been trouble between 'em."

"So what?"

"Cops do things sometimes they don't never put into a report or even tell anybody about. If this murder originated in some night club, we was sure of one thing: More than one person knew who done it but them people don't talk."

"Has this," I asked, "got any-

thing to do with the little man who bought us the wine?"

"You got it. We looked up who we could find working for Elphin who had a police record. We found a waiter named Dupel and the doorman named Forey had served time for robbery. The little guy that we met there keeps a store near where I live, and he don't mind getting drunk. But he stays smart when he does it. We give him a big roll of money with one bill in it that we'd tore apart and pasted together with the tape that had the name of his store on it.

"Elphin had been hard up for money and hadn't paid his help regular. It was our idea that a guy who didn't like cops and who was too drunk to know what he was doing wouldn't get by two guys who had robbery records if he had a big roll on him. After I and you had left Elphin's, the little guy paid his check and dropped his roll on the floor and had the waiter pick it up for him. He pretended to be so drunk he got the waiter to take him out to the doorman. While he was waiting for a cab, he took a couple of dollars off the roll to pay for the cab and dropped his money again and pretended not to notice.

"This time the waiter didn't give it back to him. The doorman had seen him do it and the waiter slipped the roll to the doorman. Meanwhile the little guy in the cab had given the high sign to two plain-clothes cops waiting across the street and the cops pinched the two of 'em before the doorman could get rid of the money.

"It wasn't no real pinch. It was merely a phony, but they didn't know that. The cops didn't even take 'em to the station house. They took 'em to a hotel. But with stir records behind them, they knew a robbery charge would mean a long prison term, so they decided to talk.

"The waiter knew when Elphin had left the club, when he got back, and the doorman told about giving Elphin the other guy's car keys and about planting the gun in Comlin's car. He claimed he wasn't any accessory because when he planted the gun he didn't know there had been any murder. Well, then we pinched Elphin and showed him the statements, and he seen that we had him and admitted the murder."

"A strange business," I reflected.

"Not if you know cops."

He was red in the face. The Comlins were leaving headquarters and Miss Comlin had kissed him.

"For my brother," she told him.

"Say, sister," he expostulated, "you made enough trouble, so don't you go around kissing cops."

—Continued from Back Cover

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